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PHILIP AUGUSTUS;

OR,

THE BROTHERS IN ARMS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DARNLEY," "DE L'ORME,"
&c.

George Payne Rainsford James

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."—HENRY IV.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PHILIP AUGUSTUS.

CHAPTER I.

GLOOM and consternation spread over the face of France:—the link seemed cut between it and the other nations of the earth. Each man appeared to stand alone: each one brooded over his new situation with a gloomy despondency. No one doubted that the curse of God was upon the land; and the daily,—nay, hourly deprivation of every religious ceremony, was constantly recalling it to the imaginations of all.

The doors of the churches were shut and barred; the statues of the saints were covered

with black ; the crosses on the high roads were veiled. The bells which had marked the various hours of the day, calling all classes to pray to one beneficent God, were no longer heard swinging slowly over field and plain. The serf returned from the glebe, and the lord from the wood, in gloomy silence, missing all those appointed sounds that formed the pleasant interruption to their dull toil, or duller amusements.

All old accustomed habits,— those grafts in our nature, which cannot be torn out without agony, were entirely broken through. The matin, or the vesper prayer, was no longer said ; the sabbath was unmarked by its blessed distinctness ; the fêtes, whether of penitence or rejoicing, were unnoticed and cold in the hideous gloom that overspread the land, resting like the dead amidst the dying.

Every hour, every moment served to impress the awful effects of the interdict more and more deeply on the minds of men. Was a child born, a single priest, in silence and in secrecy,

as if the very act were a crime, sprinkled the baptismal water on its brow. Marriage, with all its gay ceremonies and feasts, was blotted, with other happy days, from the calendar of life. The dying died in fear, without prayer or confession, as if mercy had gone by ; and the dead, cast recklessly on the soil, or buried in unhallowed ground, were exposed, according to the credence of the day, to the visitation of demons and evil spirits. Even the doors of the cemeteries were closed ; and the last fond commune between the living and the dead — that beautiful weakness which pours the heart out even on the cold, unanswering grave, — was struck out from the solaces of existence.

The bishops and clergy, in the immediate neighbourhood of Dijon, first began to observe the interdict ; and gradually, though steadily, the same awful privation of all religious form spread itself over France. Towards the north, however, and in the neighbourhood of the capital, the ecclesiastics were more slow in putting

it in execution ; and long ere it had reached the borders of the Seine, many a change had taken place in the fate of Guy de Coucy.

Having ascertained that the Cotereaux had really left his woods, De Coucy gave his whole thoughts to the scheme which had been proposed to him by his squire, Hugo de Barre, for surprising Sir Julian of the Mount and his fair daughter, and bringing them to his castle, without letting them know, till after their arrival, into whose hands they had fallen.

Such out of the way pieces of gallantry were very common in that age ; but there are difficulties of course in all schemes ; and the difficulty of the present one was, so to surprise the party, that no bloodshed or injury might ensue ; for certainly, if ever there was an undertaking to which the warning against jesting with edged tools might be justly applied, it was this.

The brain, however, of Hugo de Barre, which for a great part of his life had been

sterile, or at least lain fallow, seemed to have become productive of a sudden ; and he contrived a plan by which the page, who, from many a private reason of his own, was very willing to undertake the task, was to meet Sir Julian's party, disguised as a peasant, and, mingling with the retinue, to forewarn the male part thereof, of the proposed surprisal, enjoining them, at the same time, for the honour of the masculine quality of secrecy, not to reveal their purpose to the female part of the train. " For," observed Hugo de Barre, " a woman's head, as far as ever I could hear, is just like a funnel : whatever you pour into her ear, is sure to run out at her mouth."

De Coucy stayed not to controvert this ungallant position of his squire, but sent off in all haste to Gisors, for the purpose of preparing his château for the reception of such guests, as far as his scanty means would permit. His purse, however, was soon exhausted ; and yet no great splendour reigned within his halls

The air of absolute desolation, however, was done away ; and, though the young Knight had ever had that sort of pride in the neatness of his horse, his arms, and his dress, which perhaps amounted to foppery, he valued wealth too little himself, to imagine that the lady of his love would despise him for the want of it. He could not help wishing, however, that the King had given another tournament, where, he doubted not, his lance would have served him to overthrow five or six antagonists, the ransom of whose horses and armour might have served to complete the preparations he could now only commence. It was a wish of the thirteenth century ; and though perhaps not assimilating very well with our ideas at present, it was quite in harmony with the character of the times, when many a knight lived entirely by his prowess in the battle or the lists, and when the ransom of his prisoners, or of the horses and arms of his antagonists, was held the most honourable of all revenues.

As the period approached in which De Coucy had reason to believe Count Julian and his train would pass near his castle, a warder was stationed continually in the beffroy, to keep a constant watch upon the country around ; and many a time would the young Knight himself climb into the high tower, and gaze over the country spread out below.

Such was the position of the castle, and the predominating height of the watch-tower, that no considerable party could pass within many miles, without being seen in some part of their way. In general, the principal roads lay open beneath the eye, traced out, clear and distinct, over the bosom of the country, as if upon a wide map : and with more eagerness and anxiety did De Coucy gaze upon the way, and track each group that he fancied might contain the form of Isadore of the Mount, than he had ever watched for Greek or Saracen. At length, one evening, as he was thus employing himself, he saw, at some distance, the dust of a cavalcade rise over

the edge of a slight hill that bounded his view to the north-east. Then came a confused group of persons on horseback ; and, with a beating heart, De Coucy strained his eyes to see whether there were any female figures amongst the rest. Long before it was possible for him to ascertain, he had determined twenty times, both that there were, and that there were not ; and changed his opinion as often. At length, however, something light seemed to be caught by the wind, and blown away to a little distance from the party, while one of the horsemen galloped out to recover it, and bring it back.

“ ‘Tis a woman’s veil !” cried De Coucy. “ ‘Tis she ! by the sword of my father !” and darting down the winding steps of the tower, whose turnings now seemed interminable, he rushed into the court, called, to “ The saddle !” and springing on his horse, which stood always prepared, he led his party into the woods, and laid his ambush at the foot of the hill, within a hundred yards of the road that led to Vernon.

All this was done with the prompt activity of a soldier long accustomed to quick and harassing warfare. In a few minutes also, the disguises, which had been prepared to render himself and his followers as like a party of Cotereaux as possible, were assumed, and De Coucy waited impatiently for the arrival of the cavalcade. The moments now passed by with all that limping impotence of march that they ever seem to have in the eyes of expectation. For some time the Knight reasoned himself into coolness, by remembering the distance at which he had seen the party, the slowness with which they were advancing, and the rapidity with which he himself had taken up his position. For the next quarter of an hour, he blamed his own hastiness of disposition, and called to mind a thousand instances in which he had deceived himself in regard to time.

He then thought they must be near ; and, after listening for a few minutes, advanced a little to ascertain, when suddenly the sound of

a horse's feet struck on his ear, and he waited only the first sight through the branches, to make the signal of attack.

A moment after, however, he beheld, to his surprise and disappointment, the figure of a stout market-woman, mounted on a mare, whose feet had produced the noise which had attracted his attention, and whose passage left the road both silent and vacant once more. Another long pause succeeded, and De Coucy, now almost certain that the party he had seen, must either have halted, or turned from their course, sent out scouts in various directions, to gain more certain information. After a short space, one returned, and then another; all bringing the same news, that the roads on every side were clear; and that not the slightest sign of any large party was visible, from the highest points in the neighbourhood.

Evening was now beginning to fall; and, very sure that Count Julian would not travel during the night, through a country infested

by plunderers of all descriptions, the young Knight, disappointed and gloomy, emerged with his followers from his concealment; and once more, bent his steps slowly towards his solitary hall.

“Perhaps,” said he mentally, as he pondered over his scheme and its want of success,—“perhaps I may have escaped more bitter disappointment—perchance she might have proved cold and heartless—perchance she might have loved me, yet been torn from me;—and then, when my eye was once accustomed to see her lovely form gliding through the halls of my dwelling, how could I have afterwards brooked its desolate vacancy? When my ear had become habituated to the sound of her voice in my own home, how silent would it have seemed when she were gone! No, no—doubtless, I did but scheme myself pains. ‘Tis better as it is.”

While these reflections were passing in his mind, he had reached the bottom of the hill,

on which his castle stood, and turned his horse up the steep path. Naturally enough, as he did so, he raised his eyes to contemplate the black frowning battlements that were about to receive him once more to their stern solitude ; when, to his astonishment, he saw the flutter of a woman's dress upon the outward walls, and a gay group of youths and maidens were seen looking down upon him from his own castle.

De Coucy at first paused from mere surprise, well knowing that his own household offered nothing such as he there beheld ; but the next moment, as the form of Isadore of the Mount showed itself plainly to his sight, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and galloped forward like lightning, eager to lay himself open to all the disappointments, over which he had moralized so finely but a moment before.

On entering the court, he found a multitude of squires stabling their horses with all the care that promised a long stay ; and, the mo-

ment after he was accosted by old Sir Julian of the Mount himself, who informed him that, finding himself not so well as he could wish, he had come to crave his hospitality for a day's lodging, during which time he might communicate to him, he said, some important matter for his deep consideration. This last announcement was made in one of those low and solemn tones intended to convey great meaning; and, perhaps, even Sir Julian wished to imply, that his ostensible reason for visiting the castle of De Coucy was but a fine political covering, to veil the more immediate and interesting object of his coming.

“ But how now, Sir Guy !” added he; “ surely you have been disguising yourself ! With that sack over your armour, for a *cotte d'armes*, and the elm branch twisted round your casque, you look marvellous like a coterel.”

“ By my faith ! good Sir Julian,” replied De Coucy with his usual frankness, “ I look but like what I intended then. The truth is, hear-

ing of your passing, I arrayed my men like Cottreaux, and laid an ambush for you, intending to take you at a disadvantage, and making you prisoner, to bring you here; where, in all gentle courtesy, I would have entreated your stay for some few days, to force a boar and hear a lay, and forget your weightier thoughts for a short space. But, by the holy rood! I find I have made a strange mistake; for, while I went to take you, it seems you have taken my castle itself!"

"Good, good! very good!" cried Sir Julian; "but come with me, Sir Guy. Isadore has found her way to the battlements already, and is looking out at the view, which, she says, is fine. For my part, I love no fine views but politic ones.—Come, follow me.—Let me see, which is the way?—Oh, here—No, 'tisn't.—This is a marvellous stronghold, Sir Guy! — Which is the way?"

Cursing Sir Julian's slow vanity, in striving to lead the way through a castle he did not

know, with its lord at his side, Sir Guy de Coucy stepped forward, and, with a foot of light, mounted the narrow staircase in the wall, that led to the outer battlements.

“ Stay, stay ! Sir Guy !” cried the old man. “ By the rood ! you go so fast, 'tis impossible to follow ! You young men forget we old men get short of breath ; and, though our brains be somewhat stronger than yours 'tis said, our legs are not altogether so swift.”

De Coucy, obliged to curb his impatience, paused till Sir Julian came up, and then hurried forward to the spot where Isadore was gazing, or seeming to gaze, upon the prospect.

A very close observer, however, might have perceived that—though she did not turn round till the young Knight was close to her,—as his clanging step sounded along the battlements, a quick warm flush rose in her cheek ; and when she did turn to answer his greeting, there was that sort of glow in her countenance and sparkle in her eye which, strangely in opposition with

the ceremonious form of her words, would have given matter for thought to any more quick-witted person than Count Julian of the Mount.

That worthy Baron, however, wholly pre-occupied with his own sublime thoughts, saw nothing to excite his surprise, but presented De Coucy to Isadore as a noble chief of Cotereaux, who would fain have taken them prisoner, had they not in the first instance stormed his castle, and “manned, or rather,” said Sir Julian, “wo-manned, his wall,” and the worthy old gentleman chuckled egregiously at his own wit. “Now that we are here, however,” continued Sir Julian, “he invites us to stay for a few days, to which I give a willing consent:—what say you, Isadore? You will find these woods even sweeter than those of Montmorency for your mornings’ walks.”

Isadore cast down her large dark eyes, as if she was afraid that the pleasure which such a proposal gave her, might shine out too apparently. “Wherever you think fit to stay, my

dear father," replied she, " must always be agreeable to me."

Matters being thus arranged, we shall not particularize the passing of that evening, nor indeed of the next day. Suffice it to say, that Sir Julian found a moment to propose to De Coucy, to enter into the coalition which was then forming between some of the most powerful barons of France, with John King of England in his quality of Duke of Normandy, and Ferrand Count of Flanders at their head, to resist the efforts which Philip Augustus was making to recover and augment the kingly authority.

" Do not reply, Sir Guy—do not reply hastily," concluded the old Knight; " I give you two more days to consider the question in all its bearings; and on the third I will take my departure for Rouen, either embracing you as a brother in our enterprize, or thanking you for your hospitality, and relying on your secrecy."

De Coucy was glad to escape an immediate reply, well knowing that the only answer he could conscientiously make, would but serve to irritate his guest, and perhaps precipitate his departure from the castle. He therefore let the matter rest, and applied himself, as far as his limited means would admit, to entertain Sir Julian and his suite, without derogating from the hospitality of his ancestors.

The communication of feeling between the young Knight and his fair Isadore made much more rapid advances than his arrangements with Sir Julian. During the journey from Auvergne to Senlis, each day's march had added something to their mutual love, and discovered it more and more to each other. It had shone out but in trifles, it is true ; for Sir Julian had been constantly present, filling their ears with continual babble, to which the one was obliged to listen from filial duty, and the other from respect to her he loved. It had shone out but in trifles, but what is life but a

mass of trifles, with one or two facts of graver import, scattered like jewels amidst the sea-shore sands?—and 'though, perhaps, it was but a momentary smile, or a casual word, a glance, a tone, a movement, that betrayed their love to each other, it was the language that deep feelings speak, and deep feelings alone can read, but which, then, expresses a world more than words can ever tell.

When Isadore arrived at De Coucy's château, it wanted but one word to speak that she was deeply loved; and before she had been there twelve hours, that word was spoken. We will therefore pass over that day,—which was a day of long, deep, sweet thought to Isadore of the Mount, and to De Coucy one of anxious hope, with just sufficient doubt to make it hope, not joy,—and we will come at once to the morning after.

"Twas in the fine old woods, in the immediate proximity of the castle, towards that hour of the morning when young lovers may

be supposed to rise, and dull guardians to slumber in their beds. It was towards five o'clock, and the spot, a very dangerous scene for any one whose heart was not iron, with some fair being near him. A deep glade of the wood, at the one end of which might be seen a single grey tower of the castle, here opened out upon the very edge of a steep descent, commanding one of those wide extensive views, over rich and smiling lands, that make the bosom glow and expand to all that is lovely. The sun was shining down from beyond the castle, chequering the grassy glade with soft shadows and bright light; and a clear small stream, that welled from a rock hard by, wound in and out amongst the roots of the trees, over a smooth gravelly bed; till, approaching the brink of the descent, it leaped over, as if in sport, and went bounding in sparkling joyousness into the rich valley below. All was in harmony—the soft air, and the birds singing their matins, and the blue sky overhead; so

that hard must have been the heart indeed, that did not then feel softened by the bland smiles of Nature.

Wandering down the glade, side by side, even at that early hour, came De Coucy and Isadore of the Mount, alone—for the waiting-maid, Alix, was quite sufficiently discreet, to toy with every buttercup as she passed ; so that the space of full an hundred yards was ever interposed between the lovers and any other human creature.

“ Oh, De Coucy !” said Isadore, proceeding with a conversation, which for various reasons is here omitted, “ if I could but believe that your light gay heart was capable of preserving such deep feelings as those you speak !”

“ Indeed, indeed ! and in very truth !” replied De Coucy, “ my heart, sweet Isadore, is very, very different from what it seems in a gay and heartless world. I know not why, but from my youth, I have ever covered my feelings from the eyes of my companions. I believe it

was first, lest those who could not understand should laugh; and now it has become so much a habit, that often do I jest when I feel deepest, and laugh when my heart is far from merriment; and though you may have deemed that heart could never feel in any way, believe me now, when I tell you, that it has felt often, and deeply."

" Nay !" said Isadore, perhaps somewhat wilful in her mistake, " if you have felt such sensations so often, and so deeply, but little can be left for me."

" Nay, nay !" cried De Coucy eagerly. " You wrong my speech. I never loved but you. My feelings in the world, the feelings that I spoke of, have been for the sorrows and the cares of others—for the loss of friends—the breaking of fond ties—to see injustice, oppression, wrong;—to be misunderstood by those I esteemed—repelled where I would have shed my heart's blood to serve. Here, have I felt all that man can feel; but I never loved but

you. I never yet saw woman, before my eyes met yours, in whose hand I could put my hope and happiness, my life and honour, my peace of mind at present, and all the fond dreams we form for the future.—Isadore, do you believe me?”

She cast down her eyes for a moment, then raised them, to De Coucy’s surprise, swimming with tears. “Perhaps I do,” replied she.—“Do not let my tears astonish you, De Coucy,” she added; “they are not all painful ones; for to find oneself beloved as one would wish to be, is very, very sweet. But still, good friend, I see much to make us fear for the future. The old are fond of wealth, De Coucy; and they forget affection. I would not that my tongue should for a moment prove so false to my heart, as to proffer one word against my father; but, I fear me, he will look for riches in a husband to his daughter.”

“And will such considerations weigh with you, Isadore?” demanded De Coucy sadly.

“ Not for a moment !” replied she. “ Did I choose for myself, I would sooner, far sooner, that the man I loved should be as poor a knight as ever braced on a shield ; that I might endow him with my wealth, and bring him something more worthy than this poor hand. But can I oppose my father’s will, De Coucy ?”

“ What !” cried the Knight ; “ and will you, Isadore, wed the first wealthy lover he chooses to propose, and yield yourself, a cold, inanimate slave, to one man, while your heart is given to another ?”

“ Hush, hush !” cried Isadore,—“ never, De Coucy, never !— I will never wed any man against my father’s will ; so far my duty as a child compels me :—but I will never, never marry any man — but — but — what shall I say ? — but one I love.”

“ Oh, say something more, sweet, sweet girl !” cried the young Knight eagerly ;—“ say something more, to give my heart some firm assurance — let that promise be to me !”

“ Well, well !” said Isadore, speaking quick, as if afraid the words should be stayed upon her very lip, “ no one but you—Will that content you ?”

De Coucy pressed her hand to his lips, and to his heart, with all that transport of gratitude, that the most invaluable gift a woman can bestow deserves ; and yet he pressed her to repeat her promise. He feared, he said, the many powerful arts with which friends work on a woman’s mind,—the persuasions, the threats, the false reports ; and he ceased not till he had won her to repeat again and again, with all the vows that could bind her heart to his, that her hand should never be given to another.

“ They may cloister me in a convent,” she said, as the very reiteration rendered her promise bolder ; and his ardent and passionate professions made simple assurances seem cold : “ but I deem not they will do it ; for my father, though quick in his disposition, and immoveable in what he determines, loves me, I

think, too well, to part with me willingly for ever. He may threaten it; but he will not execute his threat.—But oh! De Coucy, have a care that you urge him not to such a point, that he shall say my hand shall never be yours; for if once 'tis said, he will hold it a matter of honour never to retract, though he saw us both dying at his feet."

De Coucy promised to be patient, and to be circumspect, and all that lover could promise; and, engaging Isadore to sit down on a mossy seat that Nature herself had formed with the roots of an old oak, he occupied the vacant minutes with all those sweet pourings forth of the heart to which love, and youth, and imagination alone dare give way, in this cold and stony world. Isadore's eyes were bent upon him, her hand lay in his, and each was fully occupied with the other, when a sort of half scream from the waiting-maid Alixe woke them from their dreams; and, looking up, they found themselves in the presence of old Sir Julian of the Mount.

“ Good ! good ! marvellous good !” cried the old Knight.—“ Get thee in, Isadore—without a word !—Get thee in too, good mistress looker on !” he added to Alixe ; “ 'tis well thou art not a man instead of a woman, or I would curry thy hide for thee. Get thee in, I say !—I must deal with our noble host alone.”

Isadore obeyed her father's commands in silence, turning an imploring look to De Coucy, as if once more to counsel patience. Alixe followed, grumbling ; and the old Knight, turning to De Coucy, addressed him in a tone of ironical compliment, intended to be more bitter than the most unmixed abuse.

“ A thousand thanks ! a thousand thanks ! *beau Sire !*” he said, “ for your disinterested hospitality. Good sooth, 'twas a pity your plan for taking us prisoners did not go forward ; for now you might have a fair excuse for keeping us so, too. 'Twould have been an agreeable surprise to us all—to me especially ; and I

thank you for it. Doubtless, you proposed to marry my daughter without my knowledge also, and add another agreeable surprise. I thank you for that, too, *beau Sire!*"

" You mistake me, good Sir Julian," replied De Coucy calmly: " I did not propose to wed your daughter without your knowledge, but hoped that your consent would follow your knowledge of our love. I am not rich, but I do believe that want of wealth is the only objection you could have —"

" And enough surely," interrupted Sir Julian. " What ! Is that black castle, and half a hundred roods of wild wood, a match for ten thousand marks a-year, which my child is heir to ?—Beau Sire, you do mistake. Doubtless you are very liberal, where you give away other people's property to receive yourself ; but I am of a less generous disposition.—Besides," he added, more coolly, " to put the matter to rest for ever, Sir Guy de Coucy, know that I have solemnly promised my daughter's

hand to the noble Guillaume de la Roche Guyon."

"Promised her hand!" exclaimed De Coucy, "to Guillaume de la Roche Guyon!—Dissembling traitor! By the holy rood! he shall undergo my challenge, and die for his cold treachery!"

"Mark me!—mark me! I pray you, beau Sire!" cried Sir Julian of the Mount in the same cool tone. "Should Guillaume de la Roche Guyon fall under your lance, you shall never have my child,—so help me, Heaven!—except with my curse upon her head. Ay! and even were he to die, or fall in the wars that are coming—for I give her not to him till they be passed,—you should not have her then—without," he added, with a sneer, "I was your prisoner chained hand and foot; and you could offer me acre with acre for my own land. But perhaps you still intend to keep me prisoner, here in your stronghold. Such things have been done, I know."

"They will never be done by me, Count

Julian," replied De Coucy, " though it is with pain I see you go, and would fain persuade you to stay, and think better of my suit; yet my drawbridge shall fall at your command, as readily as at my own. Yet, let me beseech you to think—I would not boast;—and still let me say, my name and deeds are not unknown in the world. The wealth that once my race possessed has not been squandered in feasting and revelry, but in the wars of the blessed cross; in the service of religion and honour. As to this Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, I will undertake, within a brief space, to bring you his formal renunciation of your promise."

" It cannot be, Sir!—it cannot be!" interrupted Sir Julian. " I have told you my mind.—What I have said is fixed as fate. If you will let me go, within this hour I depart from your castle. If you will not, the dishonour be on your own head.—Make no more efforts, Sir," he added, seeing De Coucy about to speak. " The words once passed from my

mouth are never recalled. Ask Giles, my Squire, Sir,—ask my attendants all. They will tell you the same thing. What Count Julian of the Mount has spoken, is as immovable as the earth."

So saying, the old man turned, and walked back to the castle followed by De Coucy, mourning over the breaking of the bright day-dream, which, like one of the fine gossamers that glitter in the summer, had drawn one bright shining line across his path, but had snapped for ever with the first touch.

Sir Julian's retinue were soon prepared, and the horses saddled in the court-yard; and, when all was ready, the old Knight brought down his daughter to depart. She was closely veiled, but still De Coucy saw that she was weeping, and advanced to place her on horse-back. At that moment, however, one of the squires, evidently seeing that all was not right between his Lord and the Lord of the castle, thrust himself in the way.

“ Back, Serf !” exclaimed De Coucy, laying his hand upon his collar, and in an instant he was seen reeling to the other side of the court, as if he had been hurled from a catapult. In the mean while, De Coucy raised Isadore in his arms, and, placing her on her horse, pressed her slightly in his embrace, saying in a low tone, “ Be constant, and we may win yet ;” then yielding the place to Sir Julian, who approached, he ordered the drawbridge of the castle to be lowered.

The train passed through the arch, and over the bridge ; and De Coucy advanced to the barbican to catch the last look, as they wound down the hill. Isadore could not resist, and waved her hand for an instant before they were out of sight. De Coucy’s heart swelled as if it would have burst ; but at that moment his Squire approached, and put into his hand a small packet, neatly folded and sealed, which, he said, Alixe the waiting-woman had given him for his lord. De Coucy eagerly tore it open.

It contained a lock of dark hair, with the words "Till death," written in the envelope. De Coucy pressed it to his heart, and turned to re-enter the castle.

"Ha, haw! Ha, haw!" cried Gallon the Fool, perched on the battlements. "Haw, haw, haw! Ha, haw!"

CHAPTER II.

BY tardy conveyances, and over antediluvian roads, news travelled slowly in the days we speak of; and the interdict which we have seen pronounced at Dijon, and unknown at De Coucy Magny, was even some hours older before the report thereof reached Compiègne.

We must beg the gentle reader to remember a sunny-faced youth, for whom the fair Queen of France, Agnes de Meranie, was, when last we left him, working a gay coat of arms. This garment, which it was then customary to bear over the armour, was destined to be worn by one whose sad place in history has caused many a tear.—Arthur the son of that Geoffrey

Plantagenet, who was elder brother of John Lackland, the meanest and most pitiful villain that ever wore a crown.

How it happened that, on the death of Richard Cœur de Lion, the barons of England adhered to an usurper they despised rather than to their legitimate prince, forms no part of this history. Suffice it, that John ruled in England, and also retained possession of all the feofs of his family in France, Normandy, Poitou, Anjou, and Aquitaine; leaving to Arthur nought but the duchy of Brittany, which descended to him from Constance his mother.

It is not, however, to be thought that Arthur endured with patience his uncle's usurpation of his rights. Far from it. Brought up at the court of France, he clung to Philip Augustus, the friend in whose arms his father had died, and ceased not to importune him for aid to recover his dominions. Philip's limited means, fatigued already by many vast enterprises, for long prevented him from lending

that succour to the young Prince, which every principle of policy and generosity stimulated him to grant. But while no national cause of warfare existed to make the war against King John popular with the barons of France; and while the vassals of the English king, though an usurper, remained united in their attachment to him, Philip felt that to attempt the forcible assertion of Arthur's rights would be altogether hopeless. He waited, therefore, watching his opportunity, very certain that the weak frivolity, or the treacherous depravity, of John's character, would soon either alienate some portion of his own vassals, or furnish matter of quarrel for the barons of France.

Several years thus passed after Richard's death, drawn out in idle treaties and fruitless negociations:—treaties which in all ages have been but written parchments; and negotiations, which in most instances are but concatenations of frauds. At length, as Philip had foreseen the combination of folly and wickedness, which

formed the principal point of John's mind, laid him open to the long meditated blow.

In one of his spurts of levity, beholding in the midst of her attendants the beautiful Isabella of Angoulême, affianced to Hugues le Brun, de Lusignan, Comte de la Marche, the English monarch—without the least hesitation on the score of honour, which he never knew, or decency, which he never practised,—ordered her to be carried off from the midst of her attendants, and borne to the castle of the Gueret, where he soon induced her to forget her former engagements with his vassal.

The barons of Poitou, indignant at the insult offered to their order, in the person of one of their noblest companions; and to their family, in the near relation of all the most distinguished nobles of the province, appealed to the court of Philip Augustus, as John's sovereign for his feofs in France. Philip, glad to establish the rights of his court, summoned the King of England before his peers, as Count

of Anjou; and, on his refusing to appear, eagerly took advantage of the fresh kindled indignation of the barons of Poitou and Anjou to urge the rights of Arthur to the heritage of the Plantagenets.

Already in revolt against John, a great part of each of those provinces instantly acknowledged Arthur for their sovereign; and the indignant nobles flocked to Paris to greet him, and induce him to place himself at their head. Arthur beheld himself now at the top of that tide which knows no ebb, but leads on to ruin or to glory: and, accepting at once the offers of the revolted barons, he pressed Philip Augustus to give him the belt and spurs of a knight, though still scarcely more than a boy; and to let him try his fortune against his usurping uncle in the field.

Philip saw difficulties and dangers in the undertaking; but, knowing the power of opportunity, he yielded: not, however, without taking every precaution to ensure success to

the young Prince's enterprise. For the festivities that were to precede the ceremony of Arthur's knighthood, he called together all those barons who were most likely, from ancient enmity to John, or ancient friendship for the dead Geoffrey, or from personal regard for himself, or general love of excitement and danger—or, in short, from any of those causes that might move the minds of men towards his purpose,—to aid in establishing Arthur in the continental feofs, at least, of the House of Plantagenet.

He took care, too, to dazzle them with splendour and display, and to render the ceremonies which accompanied the Prince's reception as a knight, as gay and glittering as possible.

It was for this occasion that Agnes de Meranie, while Philip was absent receiving the final refusal of John to appear before his court, employed her time in embroidering the coat of arms which the young Knight was to wear after his reception.

Although the ceremony was solemn, and the details magnificent, we will not here enter into any account of the creation of a knight, reserving it for some occasion where we have not spent so much time in description. Suffice it that the ceremony was over, and the young Knight stood before his godfather in chivalry belted and spurred, and clothed in the full armour of a knight. His beaver was up, and his young and almost feminine face would have formed a strange contrast with his warlike array, had it not been for the fire of the Plantagenets beaming out in his eye, and asserting his right to the proud crest he bore,—where a bunch of broom was supported by the triple figure of a lion, a unicorn, and a griffin, the ancient crest of the fabulous King Arthur.

After a few maxims of chivalry, heard with profound respect by all the knights present, Philip Augustus rose, and, taking Arthur by the hand, led the way from the chapel into his grand council-chamber, where, having seated

himself on his throne, he placed the Prince on his right-hand ; and the barons having ranged themselves round the council-board, the King addressed them thus :—

“ Fair Knights, and noble Barons of Anjou and Poitou ! — for to you, amongst all the honourable Lords and Knights here present, I first address myself, — at your instant prayer, that we should take some measures to free you from the tyranny of an usurper, and restore to you your lawful Suzerain, we are about to yield you our well-beloved cousin and son, Arthur, whom we tender as dearly as if he were sprung from our own blood. Guard him, therefore, nobly. Be ye to him true and faithful,— for Arthur Plantagenet is your lawful Suzerain, and none other, as son of Geoffrey, elder brother of that same John who now usurps his rights : I, therefore, Philip, King of France, your Sovereign and his, now command you to do homage to him as your Liege Lord.”

At these words, each of the barons he ad-

dressed rose in turn, and, advancing, knelt before the young Prince, over whose fair and noble countenance a blush of generous embarrassment spread itself, as he saw some of the best knights in France bend the knee before him. One after another, also, the Barons pronounced the formula of homage, to the following effect : —

“ I, Hugo le Brun, Sire de Lusignan, Comte de la Marche, do liege homage to Arthur Plantagenet, my born Lord and Suzerain,—save and except always the rights of the King of France. I will yield him honourable service ; I will ransom him in captivity ; and I will offer no evil to his daughter or his wife in his house dwelling.”

After this, taking the right-hand of each in his, Arthur kissed them on the mouth, which completed the ceremony of the homage.

“ And now, fair Barons,” said Philip, “ though in no degree do I doubt your knightly valour, or suppose that, even by your own powers, together with this noble youth’s good right,

and God to boot, you could not chase from Anjou, Poitou, and Normandy, the traitor John and his plundering bands, yet it befits me not to let my cousin and godson go, without some help from me:—name, therefore, my fair Knight,” he continued, turning to Arthur, “ such of my valiant Barons as, in thy good suit, thou judgest fit to help thee valiantly in this thy warfare; and, by my faith! he that refuses to serve thee as he would me, shall be looked upon as my enemy!—Yet remember,” added the King, anxious to prevent offence where Arthur’s choice might *not* fall, although such selections were common in that day, and not considered invidious, —“ remember that it is not by worthiness and valour alone that you must judge, — for then, amongst the Knights of France, your decision would be difficult; but there are, as I have before shown you, many points which render some of the barons more capable of assisting you against John of England than others; — such as their territories lying near the war;

their followers being horse or foot ; and many other considerations which must guide you as you choose."

" Oh, beau Sire," replied Arthur eagerly, " if it rests with me to choose, I name at once, that Sir Guy de Coucy I saw at the tournament of the Champeaux. There is the lion in his eye, and I have heard how in the battle of Tyre he slew nineteen Saracens with his own hand."

" He shall be sent to before the year is older by a day," replied Philip. " His castle is but one day's journey from this place. I doubt me though, from what I have heard, that his retinue is but small. However, we will summon all the vassals from the lands of his aunt's husband, the Lord of Tankerville, which will give him the leading of a prince ; and, in the meantime, as that may take long, we will give him command to gather a band of Brabançois ; which may be soon done, for the country is full of them, unhappily.—But speak again, Arthur. Whom name you next?"

“ I would say, Hugues de Dampierre, and the Sire de Beaujeu,” replied Arthur, looking towards the end of the table where those two barons sat, “ if I thought they would willingly come.”

“ By my life, they will !” replied Philip.—“ What say you, Imbert de Beaujeu ?—What say you, Hugues de Dampierre ?”

“ For my part,” replied Hugues de Dampierre, “ you well know, beau Sire, that I am always ready to put my foot in the stirrup, in any honourable cause. I must, however, have twenty days to raise my vassals; but I pledge myself, on the twenty-first day from this, to be at the city of Tours, followed by sixty as good knights as ever couched a lance, all ready to uphold Prince Arthur with hand and heart.”

“ Thanks, thanks ! beau Sire,” replied Arthur, in an ecstasy of delight. “ That will be aid, indeed !” Then, careful not to offend the barons of Poitou by seeming to place more confidence in the strength of others than in their efforts in his cause, he added, “ If, even

by the assistance of the noble barons of Poitou alone, I could not have conquered my feofs in France, such generous succour would render my success certain ; and in truth, I think, that if the Sire de Beaujeu, and the Count de Nevers, who looks as if he loved me, will but hold me out a helping hand, I will undertake to win back my crown of England from my bad uncle's head."

" That will I,—that will I, boy !" said the blunt Count de Nevers. " Hervey de Donzy will lend you his hand willingly, and his sword in it to boot. Ay, and if I bring thee not an hundred good lances to Tours, at the end of twenty days, call me recreant an' you will. My say is said !"

" And I," said Imbert de Beaujeu, " will be there also, with as many men as I can muster, and as many friends as love me, from the other bank of the Loire. So, set thy mind at ease, fair Prince, for we will win thee back the feofs of the Plantagenets, or many a war-horse shall run masterless, and many a casque be empty."

Arthur was expressing his glad thanks, for promises which plumed his young hope like an eagle; and Philip Augustus was dictating to a clerk a summons to De Coucy to render himself instantly to Paris, with what servants of arms he could collect; if he were willing to serve Arthur Duke of Brittany in his righteous quarrel, when the seats which had remained vacant round the council-chamber were filled by the arrival of the bishops of Paris, the Archbishop of Rheims, and several other bishops and mitred abbots, who had not assisted at the ceremony of Arthur's knighthood.

“ You come late, Holy Fathers,” said Philip, slightly turning round. “ The ceremony is over, and the council nearly so;” and he proceeded with what he was dictating to the clerk.

The clergy replied not, but by a whisper among themselves; yet it was easy to judge, from their grave and wrinkled brows, and anxious eyes, that some matter of deep moment sat heavily on the mind of each. The moment after, however, the door of the council-cham-

ber again opened, and two ecclesiastics entered, who, by the distinctive marks which characterise national features, might at once be pronounced Italians.

The clerk, who wrote from Philip's dictation, was kneeling at the table beside the Monarch's chair, so that, speaking in a low voice, the King naturally bent his head over him, and consequently took no notice of the two strangers, till he was surprised into looking up, by hearing a deep loud voice begin to read, in Latin, all the most heavy denunciations of the Church against his realm and person.

“ By the Holy Virgin Mother of Our Lord ! ” cried the King, his brow reddening and glowing like heated iron, “ this insolence is beyond belief ! Have they then dared to put our realm in interdict ? ”

This question, though made generally, was too evidently applied to the bishops, for them to escape reply, and the Archbishop of Rheims, though with a flush on his cheek, that bespoke

no small anxiety for the result, replied boldly, at least as far as words went.

“ It is but too true, Sire. Our Holy Father the Pope, the common head of the great Christian Church, after having in vain attempted to lead you by gentle means to religious obedience, has at length been compelled, in some sort, to use severity; as a kind parent is often obliged to chastise his—”

“ How now !” cried Philip in a voice of thunder: “ Dare *you* use such language to me ? I marvel you sink not to the earth, Bishop, rather than so pronounce your own condemnation !—Put those men forth !” he continued, pointing to the two Italians, who, not understanding any thing that was said at the table, continued to read aloud the interdict and anathema, interrupting and drowning every other voice, with a sort of thorough bass of curses, that, detached and disjointed as they were, almost approached the ridiculous. “ Put them forth !” thundered the King to his men-at-

arms. “ If they go not willingly, cast them out headlong!—But no !” he added, after a moment, “ they are but instruments—use them firmly, but courteously, Serjeant. Let me not see them again.—And now, Archbishop, tell me, have you dared to give your countenance and assent to this bold insolence of the Pontiff of Rome ?”

“ Alas ! Sire, what could I do ?” demanded the Archbishop, in a much more humble tone than that which he had before used.

“ What could you do ?” exclaimed Philip. “ By the *joyeuse* of St. Charlemagne ! do you ask me what you could do ? Assert the rights of the Clergy of France !—assert the rights of the King !—refuse to recognise the usurped power of an ambitious Prelate ! Yield him obedience in lawful things ; but stand firmly against him, where he stretched out his hand to seize a prerogative that belongs not to his place !—This could you have done, Sir Bishop ! and, by the Lord that liveth, you shall find it the worse for you, that you have *not* done it !”

“ But, Sire,” urged one of the Prelates on the King’s right, “ the blessed Pope is our general and common father !”

“ Is it the act of a father to invade his children’s rights ?” demanded Philip in the same vehement tone — “ is it not rather the act of a bad stepfather, who, coming in, pillages his new wife’s children of their inheritance ?”

“ By my life ! a good likeness have you found, Sir King !” said the blunt Count de Nevers. “ I never heard a better. The Holy Church is the poor simple wife, who takes for her second husband this Pope Innocent, who tries to pillage the children — namely, the Church of France — of their rights of deciding on all ecclesiastical questions within the realm.”

“ It is too true, indeed !” said the King.— “ Now, mark me, Prelates of France ! But you first, Archbishop of Rheims ! Did you not solemnly pronounce the dissolution of my marriage with Ingerburge of Denmark, after mature

consideration and consultation with a general synod of the Clergy of France?"

"It is true, indeed, I did, Sire!" replied the Archbishop. "But—"

"But me no buts! Sir," replied the King. "I will none of them! You did pronounce the divorce. I have it under your hand, and that is enough.—And you, Bishop of Paris? You of Soissons?—and you?—and you?—and you?" he continued, turning to the Prelates, one after the other.

No one could deny the sentence of divorce which they had pronounced some years before, and Philip proceeded.

"Well then, by the Lord Almighty, I swear, that you *must*, and *shall*, support your sentence! If you were wrong, you shall bear the blame and the punishment; not I—no, nor one I love better than myself. Let that Bishop in France, who did not pronounce sentence of divorce between Ingerburge and myself, enforce the interdict within his diocese if he will; but who-

soever shall do so, Bishop or Abbot, whose hand is to that sentence, I will cast him forth from his diocese, and his feofs, and his lands. I will strip him of his wealth and his rank, and banish him from my realms for ever. Let it be marked and remembered ! for, as I am a crowned King, I will keep my word to the letter !”

Philip spoke in that firm, deep, determined tone, which gave no reason to hope or expect that any thing on earth would make him change his purpose. And after he had done, he laid his hand still clasped upon the table, the rigid sinews seeming with difficulty to relax in the least from the tension into which the vehement excitement of his mind had drawn them. He glanced his eyes, too, from countenance to countenance of the Bishops, with a look that seemed to dare them to show one sign of resistance.

But all their eyes were cast down in bitter silence, each well knowing that the fault, how-

ever it arose, lay amongst themselves; and Philip, after a moment's pause, rose from the table, exclaiming—"Lords and Knights, the council is over;" and, followed by Arthur and the principal part of the Barons, he left the Hall.

CHAPTER III.

I LOVE not to see any one depart, for the sad magic of fancy is sure to conjure up a host of phantasm dangers, and sorrows, to fill the space between the instant present, and that far distant one, when the same form shall again stand before us. We are sure too, that Time must work his bitter commission,—that he must impair, or cast down, or destroy; and I know hardly any pitch of human misery so great, that when we see a beloved form leave us, we may justly hope, on our next meeting, to find all circumstances of a brighter aspect. Make up our accounts how we will with Fate, Time is always in the balance against us.

The last sight of Isadore of the Mount called up in the breast of Guy de Coucy as sombre a train of thoughts as ever invaded the heart of man since the fall. When might he see her again? he asked himself, and what might intervene? Would she not forget him? would she indeed be his till death? Would not the slow flowing of hour after hour, with all the obliterating circumstance of time's current, efface his image from her memory? and even if her heart still retained the traces that young affection had there imprinted, what but misery would it bring to both? He had spoken hopes to her ear, that he did not feel himself; and, when he looked up at the large, dark mass of towers and battlements before him, as he turned back from the barbican, it struck his eye with the cold, dead, unhopeful aspect of a tomb. He entered it, however, and, proceeding direct to the inner court, approached the foot of the watch-tower, the small, narrow door of which opened there, without communicating with any other building.

De Coucy paced up its manifold steps, and, stationing himself at the opening, fixed his eyes upon the skirt of the forest, where the road emerged, waiting for one more glance of her he loved, though the distance made the sight but a mere slave of Fancy. In about a quarter of an hour, the train of Sir Julian appeared, issuing from the forest; and De Coucy gazed, and gazed, upon the woman's form that rode beside the chief of the horsemen, till the whole became an indistinct mass of dark spots, as they wound onward towards Vernon.

Feeling, he knew not why, an abhorrence to his own solitary hall, the young Knight remained leaning his arms upon the slight balustrade of the beffroy-tower, which, open on all sides, was only carried up farther by four small pillars supporting the roof, where hung the heavy bell called the *bancloche*. As he thus continued meditating on all that was gloomy in his situation, his eyes still strayed heedlessly over the prospect; sometimes turning in the direction of Paris, as he thought of seeking

fortune and honour in arms; sometimes looking again towards Vernon, though the object of his love was no longer visible.

On the road from Paris, however, two objects were to be seen, which he had not remarked before. The first was the figure of a man on foot, at about half a mile's distance from the castle, to which it was slowly approaching: the other was still so far off, that De Coucy could not distinguish at first whether it was a horseman, or some wayfarer on foot; but the rapidity with which it passed the various rises and falls of the road, soon showed him that, whoever it was, was not only mounted, but proceeding at the full speed of a quick horse.

For a moment or two, from old habits of observation as a soldier, De Coucy watched its approach; but then again, really careless about every thing that did not refer to his more absorbing feelings, he turned from the view, and slowly descended the steps of the tower.

His feet turned once more mechanically to the drawbridge, and placing himself under the arch of the barbican, he leaned his tall, graceful figure against one of the enormous door-posts, revolving a thousand vague schemes for his future existence. The strong swimmer, Hope, still struggled up through the waves that Reflection poured continually on his head ; and De Coucy's dreams were still of how he might win high fortune and Isadore of the Mount.

Should he in the first place, he asked himself, defy Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, and make him yield his claim ? But no—he remembered the serious vow of the old Count ; and he saw, that by so doing he should but cast another obstacle on the pile already heaped up between him and his purpose. Sir Julian had said too, that Isadore's hand was not to be given away till the coming wars were over. Those wars might be long, De Coucy thought, and uncertain :—and hope lives upon reprieves. He must trust to accident, and, in the mean time, strive

manfully to repair the wrong that Fortune had done him. But how? was the question. Tournaments, wars,—all required some equipment, and his shrunk purse contained not a single besant.

“Oh! 'tis a steep and rugged ascent!” thought De Coucy, “ that same hill of Fortune ; and the man must labour hard that would climb it, like yon old man, toiling up the steep path that leads hither.”

Such was the only notice that the young Knight at first took of the weary foot-traveller he had seen from above ; but gradually the figure, dressed in its long brown robe, with the white beard streaming down to the girdle, appeared more familiar to him ; and a few steps more, as the old man advanced, called fully to his remembrance the Hermit whose skill had so speedily brought about the cure of his bruises in Auvergne, and whom we have since had more than one occasion to bring upon the scene.

De Coucy had, by nature, that true spirit of

chivalrous gallantry, even the madness of which has been rendered beautiful by the great Spaniard. No sooner did he recognise the old man than he advanced to meet him, and aided him as carefully up the steep ascent as a son might aid a parent.

“ Welcome, good Father Hermit !” said he, “ Come you here by accident, or come you to rest for a while at the hold of so poor a knight as myself ?”

“ I came to see whether thou wert alive or dead,” replied the Hermit. “ I knew not whether some new folly might not have taken thee from the land of the living.”

“ Not yet,” replied De Coucy with a smile : “ my fate is yet an unsealed one. But, in faith, good Father, I am glad to see thee ; for, when thou hast broken thy fast in my hall, I would fain ask thee for some few words of good counsel.”

“ To follow your own, after you have asked mine ?” replied the Hermit. “ Such is the way

with man, at least.—But first, as you say, my son, I will break my fast. Bid some of the lazy herd that of course feed on you, seek me some cresses from the brook, and give me a draught of water."

" Must such be your sole food, good Hermit?" demanded De Coucy. " Will not your vow admit of some more nourishing repast after so long a journey too?"

" I seek nought better," replied the Hermit, as De Coucy led him into the hall. " I am not one of those who hold, that man was formed to gnaw the flesh of all harmless beasts, as if he were indeed but a more cowardly sort of tiger. Let your men give me what I ask,—somewhat that never felt the throb of life, or the sting of death,—those wholesome herbs that God gave to be food to all that live, to bless the sight with their beauty, and the smell with their odour, and the palate with their grateful freshness. Give me no tiger's food.—But thou lookest sad, my son," he added, gazing in De

Coucy's face, from which much of the sparkling expression of undimmed gaiety of heart that used once to shine out in every feature, had now passed away.

"I *am* sad, good Hermit," replied the young Knight. "Time holds two cups, I have heard say, both of which each man must drink in the course of his life:—either now the sweet, and then the bitter; or the bitter first, and the sweet after;—or else, mingling them both together, taste the mixed beverage through existence. Now, I have known much careless happiness in the days past, and I am beginning to quaff off the bitter bowl, Sir Hermit."

"There is but one resource," said the Hermit:—"there is but one resource, my son!"

"And what is that?" demanded De Coucy.
"Do you mean death?"

"Nay," replied the old man; "I meant Christ's cross. There is the hope, and the succour, and the reward for all evils suffered in this life! Mark me, as I sit here before thee:

—didst thou ever see a thing more withered — broken — worn ? And yet I was once full of green strength, and flourishing — as proud a thing as ever trampled on his mother-earth : rich, honoured, renowned, — I was a very giant in my vanity ! My sway stretched over wide, wide lands. My lance was always in the vanward of the battle ; my voice was heard in courts, and my council was listened to by kings. I held in my arms the first young love of my heart ; and, strange to say ! that love increased, and grew to such absorbing passion, that, as years rolled on, I quitted all for it — ambition, strife, pride, friendship, — all ! ”

“ Methinks, surely,” said De Coucy, with all his feelings for Isadore fresh on his heart’s surface, “ such were the way to be happy ! ”

“ As much as the way for a gambler to win, is to stake all his wealth upon one cast,” replied the Hermit. “ But, mark me ! — she died, and left me childless — hopeless — alone ! And I went out into the world to search for something

that might refill the void her loss had left—not in my heart, for that was as a sepulchre to my dead love, never to be opened again—no, but to fill the void in my thoughts—to give me something to think of—to care for. I went amongst men of my own age, (for I was then unbroken,) but I found them feelingless or brutal—sensual and voluptuous; either plunderers of their neighbours, or mere eaters and drinkers of fifty. I then went amongst the old; but I found them querulous and tetchy; brimful of their own miseries, and as selfish in their particular pains, as the others in their particular pleasures. I went amongst the young, and there I found generous feelings and unworn thoughts; and free and noble hearts, from which the accursed chisel of Time had never hewn out the finer and more exquisite touches of Nature's perfecting hand:—but then, I found the wild, ungovernable struggling of the war-horse for the battle-plain; the light, thoughtless impatience of the flower-changing butter-

fly,—and I gave it all up as a hopeless search, and sunk back into my loneliness again. My soul withered; my mind got twisted and awry, like the black stumps of the acacia on the sterile plains of the Desert; and I lived on in murmuring grief and misanthropy, till came a blessed light upon my mind, and I found *that* peace at the foot of Christ's cross, which the world and its things could never give. Then it was I quitted the habitations of men, in whose commune I had found no consolation, and gave myself up to the brighter hopes that opened to me from the world beyond!"

De Coucy was listening with interest, when the sound of the warder's horn from one of the towers announced that something was in sight, of sufficient importance to call for immediate attention.

"Where is Hugo de Barre," exclaimed the Knight, starting up; and, excusing this incivility to the Hermit, he proceeded to ascertain the cause of the interruption.

“ Hugo de Barre is in the tower himself, beau Sire,” replied old Onfroy the Seneschal, whom De Coucy crossed at the hall-door, just as he was carrying in a platter full of herbs to the Hermit, with no small symptoms of respect. “ I see not why he puts himself up there, to blow his horn, as soon as he comes back ! He was never created warder, I trow !”

Without staying to notice the old man’s stickling for prerogative, De Coucy hastened to demand of the Squire wherefore he had sounded the great warder horn, which hung in the watch-tower.

“ One of the King’s serjeants-at-arms,” cried Hugo from the top of the tower, “ is but now riding up the hill to the castle, as fast as he can come, beau Sire.”

“ Shut the gates !” exclaimed De Coucy.
“ Up with the bridge !”

These orders were just obeyed, when the King’s serjeant, whom Hugo had seen from

above, rode up and blew his horn before the gates. De Coucy had by this time mounted the outer wall, and, looking down upon the royal officer, demanded, “ Whence come ye, Sir Serjeant, and whom seek ye ? ”

“ I come from Philip King of France,” replied the Serjeant, “ and seek Sir Guy de Coucy, Châtelain of De Coucy Magny.”

“ If you seek for no homage or man-service, in the King’s name, for these my free lands of Magny,” replied De Coucy, “ my gates shall open, and my bridge shall fall; but, if you come to seek liege homage, return to our Beau Sire, the King, and tell him, that of my own hand I hold these lands; that for them I am not his man; but that they were given as free share, by Clovis, to their first possessor, from whom to me, through father and child, they have by right descended.”

“ I come with no claim, beau Sire,” replied the royal messenger, “ but simply bear you a loving letter from my Liege Lord,

Sir* Philip the King, with hearty greetings on his part."

"Open the gates then," cried De Coucy, still, however, taking the precaution to add, in a loud voice,—"Mark, all men, that this is not in sign or token of homage or service; but merely as a courtesy to the messenger of the Lord King!" So unsettled and insecure was the right of property in those days, and such were the precautions necessary to guard every act that might be construed into vassalage!

De Coucy descended to receive the messenger; and, on entering the hall, found the old Seneschal still busy in serving the Hermit, and

* This must not be looked upon as an expression hazarded without authority, notwithstanding its homeliness. The only titles of honour known in those days were *Monseigneur*, *My Lord*; *Illustres Seigneurs*, applied in general to an assembly of nobles; and *Beau Sire*, or Fair Sir, which was not only bestowed upon Kings, on all occasions, but, even as lately as the reign of St. Louis, was addressed to God himself. Many prayers beginning *Beau Sire Dieu* are still extant.

apparently bestowing on him a full, true, and particular account of the family of the De Coucys, as well as of his young lord's virtues, exploits, and adventures, with the profound and inexhaustible garrulity of an old and favoured servant. At the Knight's approach, however, he withdrew ; and the King's sergeant-at-arms was ushered into the hall.

“ I was commanded to wait no answer, beau Sire,” said the man, delivering the packet into the Châtelain’s hand. “ The King, trusting to the known loyalty and valour of the Sire de Coucy, deemed that there would be but one reply, when he was called to high deeds and a good cause.”

“ By my faith !” exclaimed the Knight, “ I hope some one has dared to touch the glove I hung up in the Queen’s good quarrel ! I will drive my lance through his heart, if it be defended with triple iron !—But I see thou art in haste, good friend. Drain one cup of wine, and thou shalt depart.”

De Coucy cut not the silk that tied the packet till the messenger was gone. Then, however, he opened it eagerly, and read :—

“ To our faithful and well-beloved, Sir Guy de Coucy, these. Having undertaken, and pledged our kingly word to Arthur Plantagenet Duke of Brittany, our well-beloved Cousin and Godson in arms, to aid him and assist him, to the utmost of our power, in his just and righteous war against John of Anjou, calling himself King of England: and he, Arthur, our Cousin, as aforesaid, having desired us to use our best entreaty and endeavour to prevail on you, Sir Guy de Coucy, renowned in arms, to aid with your body and friends in his aforesaid just wars; we therefore, thus moved, do beg, as a king may beg, that you will instantly, on the reading hereof, call together your vassals and followers, knights, squires, and servants of arms, together with all persons of good heart and prowess in war,

volunteers or mercenaries, as the case may be, to join the aforesaid Arthur at our court of the City of Paris, within ten days from the date hereof, for the purposes hereinbefore specified. Honour in arms — fair favour of your lady, and the King's thanks, shall be your reward: and, for the payment of such Brabançois, or other mercenaries as you can collect to serve under your banner in the said wars, not to exceed five hundred men, this letter shall be your warrant on the treasurer of our royal *domaines*, at the average hire and pay, mensual and diurnal, given by us during the last war.—Given at our Court of Paris, this Wednesday the eve of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Heaven, to whom we commend thee in all love. THE KING."

A radiant flush of joy broke over De Coucy's countenance as he read; but before his eye had reached the end of the letter, importunate memory raked up the forgotten bankruptcy of

his means, and cast it in his teeth. The hand which held the letter before his eyes dropped to his side ; and with the fingers of the other, he wandered thoughtfully over his brow, while he considered and reconsidered every expedient for raising sums sufficient to furnish him worthily forth for the expedition to which he was called. In the mean while, the Hermit sat beside him, marking his every action, with a glance that might perhaps have suited Diogenes, had not a certain pensive shake of the head, as he gazed on the working of human passions in the noble form before him, showed a somewhat milder feeling than the Cynic of the tub was ever touched withal.

“ Oh, that foul creditor, Poverty !” muttered De Coucy. “ He chains the mind and the heart, as well as the limbs ; and pinions down great desires and noble actions, to the dungeon floor of this sordid world. Here, with a career of glory before me, that might lead to riches, to fame, to love ! I have not a besant to equip

my train ; all tattered from the wars in Palestine. As for the Brabançois, too, that the King bids me bring, they must ever have some money to equip, before they are fit for service. He should have known *that*, at least ; but he forgot, he wrote to a beggar, who could not advance a crown were it to save his nearest from starvation !”

“ You are vexed, my son,” said the Hermit, “ and speak aloud, though you know it not. What is it moves thee thus ?”

“ I am moved, good Hermit,” replied the Knight sadly, “ that now—at the very moment when all the dearest hopes of my heart call on me to push forward to the highest goal of honour, and when the way is clear before me—that the emptiness of my purse—the perfect beggary of my fortunes, casts a bar in my way that I cannot overleap. Read that letter, and then know, that, instead of a Baron’s train, I can but bring ten mounted men to serve Prince Arthur ; nor are these armed or equipped so

that I can look on them without shame. My lodging must be in the field, my food gathered from the earth, till the day of battle, nor dare I join the Prince till then ; for the expenses of the city suit not those whose purses are so famished as mine."

" Nay, my son," replied the Hermit calmly, " think better of thy fortunes. To win much, one must often lose somewhat : and by a small expense, though you may not ruffle it amongst the proudest of the Prince's train, you may fit yourself to grace it decently, till such time as in the battle-field you can show how little akin is courage to wealth. This may be surely done at a very small expense of gold."

" A small expense of gold !" exclaimed the young Knight impatiently. " I tell thee, good Father, I have none ! None—no, not a besant !"

" Nay, then," replied the Hermit, " something you must sell, to produce more hereafter. That rare carbuncle in your thumb-ring will

bring you doubtless gold enough to shine as brightly as the best."

" Nay," said De Coucy, " I part not with that. I would rather cut off the hand it hangs upon, and coin that into gold."

" Some woman's trinket," said the Hermit with a frown ; for men attached to the Church, by whatever ties, were not very favourable to the idolatrous devotion of that age to the fairer sex—a devotion which they might think somewhat trespassed upon their rights. " Some woman's trinket, on my life !" said the Hermit. " Thou wouldest guard no holy relic so, young man."

" Faith, Hermit, you do me wrong," replied De Coucy, without flinching. " Though my love to my lady be next to my duty to my God, yet this is not, as you say, a woman's trinket. 'Twas the gift of a good and noble Knight, the Count de Tankerville, to me, then young and going to the Holy Land, put on my finger with many a wise and noble counsel, by which I have striven to guide me since. Death, as thou

hast heard, good Hermit, has since placed his cold bar between us; but I would not part with this for worlds of ore. I am like the wild Arab of the Desert," he added with a smile, "in this sort somewhat superstitious; and I hold this ring, together with the memory of the good man who gave it, as a sort of talisman to guard me from evil spirits."

" Well! if thou wilt not part with it, I cannot help thee," replied the Hermit. " Yet I know a certain jeweller would give huge sums of silver for such a stone as that."

" It cannot be!" answered De Couey. " But now thou mind'st me; I have a bright smaragd, that, in my young days of careless prosperity, I bought of a rich Jew at Ascalon. If it were worth the value that he gave it, 'twere now a fortune to me.—I pray thee, gentle Hermit, take it with thee to the city. Give it to the jeweller thou speakest of; and bid him, as an honest and true man, send me with all speed what sum he may."

The Hermit undertook the charge; and De

Coucy instantly sent his page to the chamber, where he had left the emerald, which, being brought down, he committed to the hands of the old man, praying him to make no delay. The Hermit, however, still seemed to hanker after the large carbuncle on De Coucy's hand, (which was also, be it remarked, engraved with his signet,) and it was not till the young Knight had once and again repeated his refusal, that he rose to depart.

De Coucy conducted him to the outer gate, followed by his page, who, when the old man had given his blessing, and begun to descend the hill, shook his head with a meaning look, exclaiming, “Ah, beau Sire ! he has got the emerald ; and, I fear, you will never hear more of it : but, he has not got the carbuncle, which was what he wanted. When first he saw you, at the time you were hurt in Auvergne, he looked at nothing but that ; and would have had it off your hand too, if Hugo and I had not kept our eyes on him all the while.”

“ Nonsense, nonsense, boy!” cried De Coucy; “ send me the new servant of arms Jodelle !

The Coterel was not long in obeying the summons. “ You told me,” said De Coucy, as he approached, “ not many days ago, that you had once been followed by a band of two hundred Brabançois, who were now, you heard, roaming about, seeking service with some Baron or Suzerain who would give them employment. Have you any means of communicating with them, should you wish it ? ”

“ Why, you know, beau Sire,” replied Jodelle, “ and there is no use of denying it, that we are oftentimes obliged to separate when the wars are over, and go hither and thither to seek food as we best may ; but we take good care not to do so without leaving some chance of our meeting again, when we desire it. The ways we manage that, are part of our mystery, which I am in no manner bound to divulge ; but I doubt not I could soon discover, at least, where my ancient companions are.”

“ I seek none of your secrets, Sir Brabançois,” said De Coucy. “ If you can find your companions, do ; and tell them for me, that the King calls upon me to aid the Prince Arthur Plantagenet against bad John of Anjou, giving me commission, at the same time, to raise a body of five hundred free spears, to serve under my leading ; for whose pay, at the rate of the last war, Philip makes himself responsible. If your companions will take service with me, therefore, they may ; but each man must have served before, must be well trained to arms, disciplined, and obedient ; for De Coucy is no marauder, to pass over military faults, because ye be free companions.”

The Coterel readily undertook a task that chimed so well with what he already purposed ; bounding his promises, however, to endeavours ; and striving to wring from De Coucy some offer of present supply to equip his troop, whom he well knew to be in a very indifferent condition, as far as arms and habiliments went.

Finding this to be out of the young Knight's power, he left him, and proceeded, as rapidly as possible, to seek out the hiding-place of the wild band, with whom we have already seen him in contact. His farther motions for the next two days were not of sufficient interest to be here put down ; but on the third morning he presented himself at the young Knight's chamber-door, as he was rising, bringing him news that he had discovered his band, and that they willingly agreed to follow so renowned a knight. He added, moreover, that at mid-day precisely, they would present themselves for *monstre*, as it was called, or review, in the great carrefour of the forest. In the mean time, he swore faith, true service, and obedience to the young Knight in their name, for so long as the war should last.

The time of De Coucy and his followers had been employed in polishing and preparing all the old arms, offensive and defensive, that the castle contained ; and of the former, indeed, no

small quantity had been collected ; so that in the great hall lay many a sheaf of arrows and a pile of spears, with swords, daggers, maces and bows not a few ; some scores of battle-axes and partizans, together with various anomalous weapons, such as bills, hooks, long knives, iron stars, and cutting pikes. But of defensive armour, the supply was wofully small.

At the appointed hour of mid-day, the Knight, followed by his squire and servants, now armed more completely than on their return from Palestine, proceeded to the great carrefour of the forest, where, as they approached, they beheld the body of Brabançois already arrived on the ground, and drawn up in so regular and soldierlike a manner, that even the experienced eye of De Coucy was deceived at first, and he fancied them as well-armed a body of cavalry as ever he had seen.

When he came into the centre of the carrefour, however, a very different sight struck his

eye ; and he could not help striking his gauntletted hand upon his thigh till the armour rang again, with pure mortification at seeing the hopeless state of rust and raggedness of his new recruits.

Nor was this all : not two of the party presented the same appearance. One was in a steel corslet,—another in a haubert,—another had neither one nor the other. Some had brassards,—some had cuissards,—some had splints,—some had none at all. In short, it seemed as if they had murdered half-a-dozen men-at-arms, and divided their armour between two hundred ; so that when De Coucy thought of presenting himself, thus followed, at the court of Philip Augustus, he was first like to give himself up to despair, and then burst into a loud fit of laughter.

A very slight circumstance, however, changed the face of affairs. As he stood gazing on his ragged troop, with a half-rueful, half-laughing countenance, an ass, apparently loaded with

sand, and a man driving it, were seen slowly approaching, as if intending to proceed to the castle.

“By the Lord!” cried the young Knight, “this is a Godsend—for, on my word, we shall want sand enough to scrub our armour. What hast thou there, good man?” he added, as the ass and his driver came near.

“Sand for the Châtelain de Coucy,” replied the man. “Be you he?”

“Yes,” answered the Knight.—“Sand for me!—What mean you, good friend? You must mistake.”

“Not so, beau Sire!” replied the driver, approaching and speaking low—“’tis a thousand marks of silver!”

“Ha!—Who from?”

“The price of a ring,” replied the man, “sent by the holy Bernard of St. Mandé by me, his humble penitent, to the Sire de Coucy.”

“That alters the matter!” cried the Knight.—“that alters the matter! Take thy sand

to the castle, good friend.—Hugo, ride with all speed to Vernon. Bring me all the armourers of the town, with all the arms they have ready. Send a serf to Gisors on the same errand.—A thousand marks of silver!—By the Lord that lives! I will equip an army!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE night was dark and gloomy. A thousand black clouds were flitting over the sky, borne by a quick rough breeze, which ever and anon, with wild caprice, would scatter them abroad, leaving the yellow moonlight to shine bright upon their white edges, and pour a flood of mellow radiance on the world below, and then again would whirl some deep shadowy mass up from the profound verge of the horizon, and once more overwhelm all in gloom and obscurity.

Amidst such occasional glimpses of moonlight, struggled on from the village of Vincennes, through the great forest of St. Mandé,

a stout, short man, wrapped in an immense cloak, and preceded by a boy holding a torch, which the high wind threatened every moment to extinguish.

“Art thou sure thou knowest the way, urchin?” cried the man, in a wearied and panting tone, which argued plainly enough, that his corpulency loved not deeply the species of stumbling locomotion, to which his legs subjected his paunch, amidst the roots and stones of the forest path.—“Art thou sure that thou knowest the road?—Jesu preserve me! I would not lose my way here, to be called to the conclave!”

“Oh, I know the way well!” replied the boy, in a shrill treble. “I come here every day, to ask the prayers of the Holy Hermit for my grandmother, who is ninety years of age, and sick of a hydropsy.”

“Better pray God to take her, rather than to leave her!” replied his companion. “’Tis a foolish errand mine,—’tis a foolish errand!” he

continued, speaking peevishly to himself, as he struggled to shake off a pertinacious branch of withered thorn which, detached from its parent bush, clung fondly to the tail of his robe, and trailed solemnly on behind him. “ Not the errand itself, which is holy, just, and expedient ; but the coming at night.—Take care, urchin ! The wind will blow it out, if you flaunt it after such a fashion.—The coming at night !—Yet what could I do ? The canon of St. Berthe’s said true—that if I came in the day, folks would say I could not govern my diocese myself.—I told you so, foolish child ! I told you so !—Now, what are we to do ? ” continued he, raising his voice to the very highest pitch of dismay and crossness ; as a sharp gust of wind, up one of the long glades, extinguished completely the flame of the torch, which had for some time been wavering with a very undecided sort of flicker :—“ now, what are we to do ? ”

“ Oh, I know the wyy, as well without the

light as with," replied the same childish voice :
" I'll lead you right, beau Sire."

" Ay, ay, child," said the other ; " but I love not forests in the dark :—this one has a bad name too—'tis said more sorts of evil spirits than one haunt it. The Lord be merciful unto us ! The devil is powerful in these hours of darkness ! And besides, there are other dangers—" Here he stumbled over one of the large roots of an elm, shot across the path, and would doubtless have fallen at full length, had not his little guide's shoulder come opportunely in the way of his hand, as it sprawled forth in the act of descent, and thus afforded him some stay !—" Cursed be the root !" cried he ;—" cursed be it, above the earth, and under the earth !—cursed be it in this life, and to all eternity ! Amen.—Lord have mercy upon me ! Sinner that I am ! I am repeating the anathema. It will never go out of my head, that anathema—cursed be it !—Boy, is it far off still ?—Did not you hear a noise ?" he added suddenly.

“ I hear the rustling of the wind,” replied the child, “ but nothing more. You folks that do not live near the forests, do not know what sounds it makes sometimes.”

“ Evil spirits, boy!—evil spirits!” cried the man. “ Evil spirits, I tell thee, screaming in their malice; but I vow I hear a rushing, as if there were some wild beasts.—Hark! hark!” and he grasped the boy’s arm, looking round and round in the darkness, which his fancy filled with all the wild creation of fear.

“ *Ne in furore tuo arguas me, Domine, neque in irâ tuâ corripias me. Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum!*” cried the frightened traveller; when suddenly the clouds rolled white away from the face of the moon, and her beams for a moment, streaming down clear upon them, showed the wide open glade of the wood, untenanted by any one but themselves, with the old ruined tomb in the forest, and the rude hut of Bernard the Hermit. “ *Kyrie eleïson! Christe eleïson!*” cried the traveller, at the sight of these

blessed rays ; and running forward to reach the dwelling of the Hermit, before the clouds again brought darkness over the face of the earth, he arrived, all breathless and panting, and struck hard with his fist against the closed door. “Open, open ! Brother Bernard ! and let me in,” he cried loudly. “Let me in, before the moon goes behind the cloud again.”

“Who art thou, who breakest through my prayers ?” cried the voice of the Hermit. “And why fearest thou the going of the moon ? Thou wilt not be one jot wiser when she is gone ?”

“Nay ! 'tis I, Brother Bernard,” replied the traveller, fretting with impatience to get in. “'Tis I, I tell thee, man ! Thy friend and fellow-labourer in this poor vineyard of France !”

“I have no friend but the Lord, and his holy saints,” said the Hermit, opening the door. —“But how is this, Lord Bishop ?”

“Hush ! hush !” cried the other, holding

up his hand. “ Do not let the boy hear thee ! — I come in secret, upon matters of deep import.”

“ Does not the text say, ‘ *That which thou doest in secret shall be proclaimed openly ?* ’ ” demanded the Hermit. — “ But what dost thou mean to do with the boy ? ” continued he, laying his hand on the child’s head. “ If he be as terrified as thou seemest to be, he will not love to stay till thine errand with me is done.”

“ Oh, I fear not, Father,” said the youth. “ I am forest bred ; and nothing evil would come within sight of thy dwelling.”

“ Well, poor lad ! ” said the Hermit. “ Sit there by the door ; and if aught scares thee, push it open, and come in.”

The boy accordingly seated himself by the door, which was shut upon him ; and the Hermit pointed a place on his bed of straw and moss, for the Bishop’s seat. If it had any distinction, ’twas solely that of being situated beneath the crucifix, under which a small lamp

was burning, giving the only light which the cell possessed.

The good Prelate — for such he was — cast himself upon the moss, and stretching forth his hands on his broad fat knees, employed no inconsiderable space of time in cooling himself, and recovering his breath, after the bodily fear and exertion he had undergone. The Hermit seated himself also ; and waited, in grave silence, the communication, whatever it was, that brought so respectable a dignitary of the Church as the Bishop of Paris to his cell at so unsuitable an hour.

“ The Lord be merciful unto me !” cried the Bishop, after a long pause. “ What perils and dangers have I not run this very night, for the service of the Church, and the poor Christian souls of the French people, who are now crying for the rites and ceremonies of the Church, as the tribes of Israel cried for flesh in the desert.”

“ But if report speaks right,” replied the

Hermit, “ thy flock has no need to cry ; as the interdict has not yet been enforced within thy diocese, Father Bishop.”

“ True ! unhappily too true !” cried the Prelate, imagining that the Hermit imputed blame to him for the delay. “ But what could I do, brother Bernard ? God knows—praised be his Name !—that I have the most holy and devout fear of the authority of the blessed Church of Rome ;—but how can I bear to tear the food of salvation from the mouths of the poor hungry people ?—Besides, when I did but mention it to the King, he cried out, in his rude and furious way :—‘ By the joyeuse of St. Charlemagne ! Bishop, take care what you do ! As long as you eat of the fat, and drink of the strong, you Prelates of France mind nothing ; but let me hear no more of this interdict, or I will smite you hip and thigh ! I will drive you forth from your benefices ! I will deprive you of your feofs, and I will strip you of your wealth !—and then you may get rosy wines and rich meats where you can !’ ”

A sort of cynical smile gathered round the Hermit's lip, as if in his heart he thought Philip's estimate of the clergy of his day was not a bad one: and indeed their scandalous luxury was but too fertile a theme of censure to all the severer moralists of those times. He contented himself, however, with demanding what the Prelate intended to do.

“ Nay, on that subject, I came to consult you, Brother Bernard,” replied the Bishop. “ You have ever shown yourself a wise and prudent man, since you came into this place, some seven years ago; and all you have recommended has prospered.—Now, in truth, I know not what to do. The King is furious. His love for this Agnes—(If God would but please to take her to himself, what a blessing!)—is growing more and more. He has already cast out half the Bishops of France for enforcing the interdict, and seized on the lands of many of the Barons who have permitted or encouraged it.—What can I do? If I enforce it, he will cast me out too; and the people will be no

better. If I do not enforce it, I fall under the heavy censure of our Holy Father the Pope!"

" You know your duty, Father Bishop, far better than I can tell it to you," replied the Hermit, with what might almost be called a malicious determination to give no assistance whatever to the poor Prelate, who, between his fears of Rome, and his dread of losing his diocese, laboured like a ship in a stormy sea. " Your duty must be done."

" But hearken, brother Bernard," said the Bishop. " You know John of Arville, the Canon of St. Berthe's—a keen, keen man, though he be so quiet and calm, and one that knows every thing which passes in the world, though he be so devout and strict in his religious exercises."

" I know him well," said the Hermit sternly, as if the qualities of the worthy canon stood not high in his esteem,—" What of him?"

" Why, you know that now William of Albert is dead, this John is head of the Canons of

St. Berthe," replied the Bishop. " Now, you must know still farther, that a few days ago, the young Count d'Auvergne, with his train, came to Paris and was hospitably received by the Canons of St. Berthe, in whose church his father had been a great founder. As the interdict is strictly kept in his own part of the country, the Count could not confess himself there ; but, wisely and religiously, seeing that years might elapse before he could again receive the comforts of the Church if the interdict lasted, and not knowing what might happen in the mean time—for life is frail, you know, Brother Bernard—he resolved to confess himself to John of Arville, the Canon; which he did. So, then, you see, John of Arville came away to me, and told me, that he had a great secret, which might heal all the wounds of the State."

" How !" exclaimed the Hermit, starting up.
" Did he betray the secrets of confession ?"

" No, no ! You mistake, Brother Bernard," cried the Bishop peevishly. " No, no ! He

did not betray the secrets of confession ; but, in his conversations afterwards with the young Count, he drew from him, that he loved this Agnes de Meranie, and that she had been promised to him by her brother as he went to the Holy Land : and that her brother being killed there, and her father knowing nothing of the promise, gave her to the King Philip. But now, hearing that the marriage is not lawful, he—her father, the Duke of Istria—has charged this young Count d'Auvergne, as a knight, and one who was her dead brother's dear friend, secretly to command her, in his name, to quit the Court of France, and return to his protection : and the Count has thereon staked life and fortune, that if she will consent, he will find means to bring her back to Istria, in despite of the whole world. This is what he communicated to the reverend Canon, not, as you say, in confession, but in sundry conversations after confessions."

Bernard the Hermit gave no thought to

what, in our eyes, may appear a strange commission for a parent like the Duke of Istria to confide to so young a man as the Count d'Auvergne. But, in those days, we must remember, such things were nothing strange ; for knightly honour had as yet been so rarely violated that, to doubt it for an instant, under such a mark of confidence, would have been then considered as a proof of a base and dishonourable heart. The Hermit's mind, therefore, turned alone to the conduct of the priest.

“ I understand,” replied he, drawing his brows together, even more sternly than he had heretofore done. “ The reverend Canon of St. Berthe’s claims kindred in an equal degree with the fox and the wolf. He has taken care that the Count’s secrets, first communicated to him *in confession*, should be afterwards repeated to him without such a seal. Thinks he, I wonder, to juggle Heaven, as well as man, with the letter instead of the spirit ? And

doubtless, now, he would gladly give the Count d'Auvergne all easy access to persuade this unhappy girl to return ; so that he, the Canon of St. Berthe's, may but save his diocesan from the unwieldy burden of the interdict, at the expense of a civil war between the powerful Count d'Auvergne and his liege lord Philip. 'Tis a goodly scheme, good Father Bishop ; but 'twill not succeed. Agnes loves Philip—looks on him as her husband—refuses to part from him—has the spirit of a hero in a woman's bosom, and may as soon be moved by such futile plans, as the north star by the singing of the nightingale."

" See what it is to be a wise man !" said the Bishop, unable to restrain a little triumphant chuckle, at having got the Hermit at fault.— " See what it is to be a wise man, and not hear a simple story out ! Besides, good Brother Bernard, you speak but uncharitably of the reverend Canon of St. Berthe's, who is a holy and religious man ; though, like you yourself,

somewhat too proud of worldly wisdom — a-hem !”

“ A-hem !” echoed something near ; at least, so it seemed to the quick and timorous ears of the worthy Prelate, who started up and listened. “ Did you not hear something, Brother Bernard ?” demanded he in a low voice. “ Did you not hear a noise ? Cursed be it upon the earth ! and — God forgive me — ”

“ I heard the roaring of the wind, and the creaking of the wood, but nothing else,” replied the Hermit calmly. “ But what wert thou about to say, Father Bishop ? If I have taken thee up wrongly, I am ready to acknowledge my folly. All men are but as fools, and I not amongst the least. If I have wronged the Canon of St. Berthe’s, I am ready to acknowledge the fault. All men are sinners, and I not amongst the least. But how have I been mistaken at present ?”

“ Why, altogether !” replied the Prelate, after having re-assured himself by listening several

moments without hearing any farther sound,— “ altogether, Brother Bernard. The Canon of St. Berthe’s aims at nothing you have mentioned. No one knows better than he the Queen’s mind, as he is her confessor ; and he sees well, that till the King shows some sign of willingness to part with her, she will remain fixed to him, as if she were part of himself : but he knows too, that if Philip does but evince the least coldness — the least slackening of the bonds that bind him to her, she will think he wearies of his constancy, or fears the consequences of his opposition to the Holy Church ; and will herself demand to quit him. His scheme therefore is, to let the King grow jealous of the Count d’Auvergne to such a point, as to show some chilliness to the Queen. Agnes herself will think that he repents of his opposition to our blessed Father the Pope, and will propose to depart. Philip’s jealousy will prevent him from saying nay ; and the reverend Canon himself, as her confessor, will

conduct her with a sufficient escort to the court of Istria ; where, please God ! he may be rewarded as he deserves, for the signal service he renders France !”

“ Hoo ! hoo ! hoo !” cried a voice from without ; which sounded through the unglazed window, as if it was in the very hut.

“ Miserere mei, Domine, secundùm multitudinem miserationum tuarum !” exclaimed the Bishop ; the rosy hue of his cheek, which had returned, in the security of the hermit’s cell, to much the colour of the field pimpernel, now fading away to the hue of the same flower in an ancient herbal.

“ ‘Tis but an owl !—’tis but an owl !” cried the Hermit ; and, fixing his eyes on the ground, he meditated deeply for several minutes, regardless of the still unsubdued terror of the Bishop, who, drawing a chaplet from beneath his robe, filled up the pause with *paters* and *aves*, strangely mixed with various very ungodly curses from the never-forgotten anathema,

which in his fright, like prisoners in a popular tumult, rushed forth against his will, the moment fear unbarred the door of his lips.

“It is a cruel scheme!” said the Hermit at length, “and the man who framed it is a cruel man; who, for his own base ambition of gaining bishoprics in Germany and credit at Rome, scruples not to tear asunder the dearest ties of the heart—but for you or me, Father Bishop,” he added, turning more immediately to the Prelate, “for you and me, who have no other interest in this thing, than the general welfare of our country, to prevent civil war and general rebellion of the King’s vassals, which will inevitably ensue if the interdict lasts, especially while he bears so hard a hand upon them,—for us, I say, it is to consider whether by the sorrow inflicted in this instance, infinite, infinite misery may not be spared through the whole nation. If you come then, Father Bishop, to ask me my opinion, I think the scheme which this Canon of St. Berthe’s proposed may be

made use of—as an evil indeed—but as the least, infinitely the least, of two great ones. I think, then, that it may conscientiously be made use of; but, at the same time, I think the worse of the man that framed it—ay! and he knew I should think the worse of him!"

"Why, indeed, and in truth, I believe he did," answered the Bishop, who had somewhat recovered his composure by the non-repetition of the sounds.—"I believe he did, for he mightily opposed my consulting you on the matter; saying that—though all the world knows, Brother Bernard, you are a wise man, and a holy one too; for, indeed, none but a holy man dare inhabit such a wild place, amidst all sorts of evil spirits—cursed be they above the earth and under the earth!—but saying—as I was going to observe—that if I were seen coming here, people would think I knew not how to govern my own diocese; but must needs have your help. So I came here at night, God forgive me and protect me! for, if ever the sin of

pride and false shame was punished, and repented of with fear and trembling, it has been this night."

So frank a confession changed the cynical smile that was gathering round the anchorite's lips, into one of a blander character. "Your coming in the day, good Father Bishop," replied he, "would have honoured me, without disgracing you. The world would but have said, that the Holy Bishop of Paris visited the poor Hermit of Vincennes, to consult with him for the people's good.—But let us to the question. If you will follow my counsel, good Father, you will lay this scheme before that honoured and noble Knight, and Reverend Bishop, Guerin; for, believe me, it will be necessary to keep a careful guard over Philip; and to watch him well, lest, his passions being raised to a dangerous degree, it become necessary to tell him suddenly the whole truth. I am absent from him. You are busied with the cares of your flock; and the Canon of St. Berthe's

must not be trusted. But Guerin is always near him; and, with your holy zeal and his prudent watching, this scheme, though it may tear the heart of the King and of the fair, unfortunate girl, Agnes his wife, may also save blood-shed, rebellion, and civil war, and raise the interdict from this ill-fated kingdom."

A loud scream, like that of some ravenous bird, but prolonged so that it seemed as if no mortal breath could have given it utterance, thrilled through the air as the Hermit spoke, and vibrated round and round the hut. The Bishop sank on his knees, and his little guide pushed open the door and ran in. "I dare stay out there no longer!" cried the boy: "there is something in the tree!—there is something in the tree!"

"Where?" cried the Hermit, striding towards the door, his worn and emaciated figure erecting itself, and seeming to swell out with new-born energy. "Where is this sight? Were it the Prince of Evil himself, I defy

him!"—and with a firm step, he advanced into the moonlight, between the threshold of the hut and the ancient tomb, casting his eyes up into the shattered oak, whose remaining branches stretched wide and strong over the path.

To his surprise, however, he beheld seated on one of the large boughs, in the attitude of an ape, a dark figure, like that of a man; who no sooner cast his eyes on the Hermit, than he began to pour forth more strange and detestable sounds, than ever were uttered by a human tongue, moving backwards along the branches at the same time with superhuman agility.

“ Avoid thee, Satan! In the Name of Jesus thy Conqueror! avoid thee!” cried the Hermit, holding up the crucifix attached to his rosary.

“ Ha, ha! oh rare! The interdict, the interdict!” shouted the vision, gliding along amongst the branches. “ Oh rare! oh rare!”

And then burst forth a wild scream of unnatural laughter, which for a moment rang round and round, as if echoed by a thousand voices ; then died away fainter and fainter, and at last was lost entirely ; while the dark figure, from which it seemed to proceed, disappeared amidst the gloom of the thick boughs and leaves.

“ Rise, rise, Father Bishop !” cried the Hermit, entering the hut. “ The Fiend is gone ; and verily his coming, where he has never dared to come before, seemed to show that he is fearful of your design, and would fain scare us from endeavouring to raise the interdict :—rise, good Father, I say, and be not frightened from your endeavour !” So saying, the Hermit stooped and aided his reverend visitor ; whom at his return he had found, stretched flat on his face, at the foot of the cross, before which the anchorite’s lamp was burning.

“ Now, Jesu preserve us ! this is very dread-

ful, Brother Bernard!" cried the poor Bishop, his teeth chattering in his head. "How you can endure it, and go on living here, exposed to such attacks, I know not; but I *do* know that one week of such residence would wear all the flesh off my bones."

The Hermit glanced his eye, with somewhat of a cold smile, from the round, well-covered limbs of the Prelate, to his own meagre and sinewy form. He made not, however, the comment that sprang to his lips, but simply replied, "I am not often subject to such visitations, and, as you see, the enemy flies from me when I appear."

"But, for all that," answered the Bishop, "I tell thee, good Brother Bernard, I dare as much go home through that forest alone with this urchin, as I dare jump off the tower of the Louvre!"

"Fear not: I will go with thee," replied the Anchorite. "The boy, too, has a torch, I see. The night is now clear, and the wind

somewhat gone down, so that the way will be soon trodden."

Company of any kind, under such circumstances, would have been received as a blessing by the good Bishop ; but that of so holy a man as the Hermit was reputed to be, was doubly a security. Clinging to him, therefore, somewhat closer than bespoke much valour, the Prelate suffered himself to be led out into the forest ; while the boy, with his torch now lighted again, accompanied them, a little indeed in advance, but not sufficiently so as to prevent him also from holding tight by the Anchorite's frock.

Thus, then, they proceeded through the winding paths of the wood, now in light, and now in shade, till the dark roofs of the village near Vincennes, sleeping quietly in the moonshine, met once more the delighted eyes of the Bishop of Paris. Here the Anchorite bade God speed him, and, turning his steps back again, took the way to his hut.

Did we say that the Hermit, Bernard, did

not, every now and then, give a glance to the wood on either side as he passed, or that he did not hold his crucifix in his hand, and, from time to time, murmur a prayer to Heaven or his guardian Angel, we should say what was false; but still he walked on with a firm step, and a far more erect carriage than usual, prepared to encounter the enemy of mankind, should he appear in bodily shape, with all the courage of a Christian and the zeal of an enthusiast.

When he had reached his hut, however, and fastened the door, he cast himself on his knees before the cross, and, folding his arms devoutly on his bosom, he exclaimed: —“ O, blessed Saviour! pardon if I have sinned in the counsel I have this night given. Let not weakness of understanding be attributed to me for wickedness of heart; but, as thou seest that my whole desire is to serve Thee, and do good unto my fellow-christians, grant, O Lord! pardon and remittance unto the faults of my

judgment! Nevertheless, if my counsel be evil, and thou hast permitted thy conquered enemy to show himself unto me visibly, as a sign of thy wrath, let me beseech thee, Lord! to turn that counsel aside that it have no effect, and that the sorrow of my brethren lay not heavy on my head!"

To this extempore prayer the good Hermit added one or two from the regular ritual of the Church; and then, casting himself on his bed of moss, with a calmed mind, he fell into a profound sleep.

In the mean while, day broke upon the glades of the forest; and, at about the distance of a mile from the dwelling of the Hermit, dropped down from one of the old oaks, with the first ray of the sun, no less a person than our friend Gallon the fool.

"Ha, ha!" cried he, "Ha, ha, haw! My Lord ordered me to be shut out, if I came not home by dusk; and now, by my shutting out I have heard a secret he would give his ears to

hear.—Ha, haw ! Ha, haw ! —I've ninety-nine minds not to tell him—but it wants the hundredth. So I will tell him.—Then he'll break their plot, or give news of it to the King and the Auvergne;—and then, they 'll all be hanged up like acorns.—Haw, haw ! and we shall keep the sweet interdict — the dear interdict — the beloved interdict.—I saw five dead men lying unburied in the convent field.—Haw, haw, haw ! Haw, haw ! I love the interdict — I do ! 'Tis like my nose. It mars the face of the country, which otherwise were a fair face.—Ha, haw ! I love interdicts. My nose is my interdict.—Haw, haw, haw ! But I must find other means to spite the De Coucy, for shutting me out ! I spited him finely, by sending down the old fool Julian into the glade, where he was cajoling his daughter!—Haw, haw, haw ! Ha, haw !” So saying, he bounded forward, and ran as hard as he could towards the distant city.

CHAPTER V.

LET us suppose a brief lapse of time and a slight change of scene. 'Twas the month of September; and though the mellow hand of autumn had already spread a rich golden tinge over field and wood, yet not a particle of summer's sparkling brilliancy seemed gone from the clear blue sky. 'Twas in the bright land, too, of merry Touraine, where migratory summer seems to linger longer than any where else; and, though the sickle had done its work, and the brown plains told that the year's prime was passed, yet there was a smile on the aspect of the land, as if it would fain have promised that the sweet days of the earth's life would be there immortal.

Over one of the wide open fields of that country, swelling gently with a soft undulating slope, and bordered, here and there, with low scattered woods, were seen to ride a gay party of horsemen, but few in number indeed, but with their arms glittering in the morning sun, their plumes waving in the breeze, and, in short, with all “the pomp and circumstance of war.”

In faith, it was as fair a sight to see as the world can give—a party of the chivalry of that age. For them, were all the richest habiliments reserved by law. Robes of scarlet, ornaments of gold, fine furs, and finer stuffs, were all theirs by right ; and with their banners, and pennons, and their polished armour, their embroidered coats of arms, and their decorated horses, they formed a moving mass of animated splendour, such as the present day cannot afford to show.

The group we speak of at present, wanted nothing that chivalry could display. At its head rode a fair youth, just in man’s opening day ; his eye sparkling, his cheek glowing, his

lip smiling with the bursting happiness of his heart, at finding himself freed from restraint. Lord of himself, and entering on the brilliant career of arms, supported by knights, by nobles, and by kings, to strive for—not the ordinary stake of ordinary men—but for crowns, and thrones, and kingdoms.

Arthur Plantagenet wore his helmet still; as if the new weight of honourable armour was more a delight than a burthen to him; but the visor being open, his face was clearly exposed, and spoke nothing but hope and animation. His arms were all inlaid with gold, and over his shoulders he wore the superb surcoat of arms, which had been worked for him by the fair hands of Agnes de Meranie.

On the Prince's right-hand rode Guy de Coucy, with his head still unarmed; and merely covered by a green velvet bonnet, with a jewel, and a plume of the feathers of the white egret, which had been bestowed upon him by the King on his joining the expedition

at Paris. Neither did he ride his battle-horse—which, as when we first saw him, was led behind him by a squire—but was mounted on one of the Arabian coursers which he had brought with him from the Holy Land. He had, however, his tremendous long sword by his side, the tip descending to his heel, and the hilt coming up nearly to his shoulder; and, though at the bow of his war-saddle, on the other horse, hung his heavy battle-axe and mace, a lighter axe swung by his side. His gauntlets were on, his squires were close behind him; and by various other signs of the same kind, it might be inferred that the road he was now travelling was more likely to be hostilely interrupted, than that over which he had passed in Auvergne.

On Arthur's left-hand appeared in complete arms the famous warrior and troubadour, whose songs and whose deeds have descended honourably even to our days,—Savary de Mauléon. As, in the case of De Coucy, his casque was borne behind him; but, in other respects, he was armed *cap à pied*.

Of this knight one thing must be remarked, which, though it might seem strange, was no less true, and showed the madness of that age for song. Between himself and the squires who bore his casque and led his battle-horse, rode a tiny, beautiful boy, mounted on a small fleet Limousin jennet, and habited with all the extravagant finery which could be devised. In his hand, instead of shield, or lance, or implement of bloody warfare, he bore a small sort of harp, exactly of the shape of those with which the sculptors of that period have represented King David, as well as sundry angels, in the rich tympanums of many of the gothic church-doorways in France. This instrument, however, was not fully displayed on the journey, being covered with a *housse*, or veil of silver gauze, from which, such coverings often being applied to shields of arms, any one passing by might have mistaken it for some buckler of a new and strange form.

Behind this first group, who were followed immediately by their squires, came at a little

distance a confused body of knights of lesser fame ; in general, vassals of Savary de Mauléon, or of his friends ; or others who, from disgust towards King John, had come over to the increasing party of his nephew. These were all well armed and equipped ; and, though riding for the time in a scattered and irregular manner, it wanted but a word from their chiefs, to bring them into line, or hedge, as it was called, when, with their long lances, heavy armed horses, and impenetrable persons, they would have offered a formidable barrier against any attack.

A group of servants of arms followed these knights ; and behind these again, with far more show of discipline, and covered with bright, new armour, came two hundred Brabançois, with their old captain, Jodelle, at their head. Their horses were unarmed, except by an iron poitral, to resist the blow of a lance or sword on the first assault. The riders also were but lightly harnessed, with cuirass, steel cap, and

buckler ; but, being intended principally to act either as horse-archers themselves, or against bodies of foot, they often proved the most serviceable troops in the army.

At the head of their line rode Hugo de Barre, bearing De Coucy's banner ; while, armed something like a Brabançois, but more heavily, with the place of his favourite mare supplied by a strong black horse, Gallon the Fool rode along the ranks, keeping the greater part of the soldiers in continual merriment. There were, it is true, some ten or twelve of them who knit their brows from under their iron caps at the jongleur as he passed ; but the generality of the Brabançois laughed at his jest, or gave it him back again ; and, indeed, no one seemed more amused, or in better harmony with the mad juggler, than the captain Jodelle himself.

The whole party might consist of about five hundred men ; and they moved on slowly, as if not very certain whether they might not be near some unseen enemy. The plain on which

we have said they were, was unbroken by any thing in the shape of a hedge, and sufficiently flat to give a view over its whole surface ; but, at the same time, the low woods that bordered it here and there might have concealed many thousand men, and the very evenness of the country prevented any view of what was beyond.

“ Straight before you, beau Sire !” said Savary de Maulèon, pointing forward with his hand. “ At the distance of three hours’ march, lies the famous city of Tours ; and even now, if you look beyond that wood, you will catch a faint glance of the church of the blessed St. Martin. See you not a dark grey mass against the sky, squarer and more stiff in form than any of the trees ?”

“ I do, I do !—And is that Tours ?” cried Arthur, each fresh object wakening in his heart that unaccountable delight with which youth thrills towards novelty—that dear brightness of the mind, which, in our young days, reflects all things presented to it, with a thousand splen-

did dazzling rays not their own ; but, alas ! which too soon gets dimmed and dull, in the vile chafing and rubbing of the world.—“ Is that Tours ?” and his fancy instantly conjured up, and combined with the image of the distant city, a bright whirl of vague and pleasant expectations which, like a child’s top, kept dizzyly spinning before his eyes, based on an invisible point, and ready to fall on a touch.

“ That is Tours, beau Sire,” replied the Knight ; “ and I doubt not that there, what with all my fair countrymen of Anjou and Poitou, who have already promised their presence, and others who may have come without their promise, you will find Knights enough for you to undertake at once some bold enterprize.”

Arthur looked to De Coucy, under whose tutelage as a warrior, Philip Augustus had in some degree placed the inexperienced Prince. “ Far be it from me,” said the Knight, “ to oppose any bold measure that has the probability of success along with it; but, as a general prin-

ple, I think that in a war which is likely to be of long duration, when we expect the speedy arrival of strong reinforcements, and where nothing is to be lost by some delay, it is wise to pause, so as to strike the first strokes with certainty of success ; especially where the Prince's person may be put in danger by any rash attempt."

" By the blessed St. Martin !" cried Savary de Mauléon, " I thought not to hear the Sire de Coucy recommend timid delay. Fame has, as usual, belied him, when she spoke of his courage as somewhat rash.

De Coucy had, indeed, spoken rather in opposition to the general character of his own mind ; but he felt that there was a degree of responsibility attached to his situation, which required the greatest caution, to guard against the natural daring of his disposition. He maintained, therefore, the same coolness in reply to the Poitevin Knight, although it cost him some effort to repress the same spirit manifesting

itself in his language, which glowed warm on his brow.

“Sir Guillaume Savary de Maulèon,” replied he, “in the present instance, my counsel to Prince Arthur shall be to attempt nothing, till he has such forces as shall render those first attempts certain; and, as to myself, I can but say, that when you and I are in the battle-field, my banner shall go as far, at least, as yours into the midst of the enemies.”

“Not a step farther!” said Savary de Maulèon quickly—“not a step farther!”

“That shall be as God pleases,” answered De Coucy; “but, in the mean time, we are disputing about wind. Till we reach Tours, we cannot at all tell what assistance may wait us there. If there be sufficient force to justify us in proceeding to action, I will by no means dissent; but, if there be but few of our friends arrived, I will say, that man who advises the Prince to attempt any thing yet, may be as brave as a lion, but seeks

to serve his own vanity more than Arthur Plantagenet."

"How his own vanity, Sir?" demanded Savary de Maulèon, ready to take offence on the slightest provocation.

"By risking his Prince's fortunes," replied De Coucy, "rather than let others have a share in the harvest of glory before him.—Ho, there!" he continued, turning to one of his squires, who instantly rode up.—"Bid Jodelle detach a score of his lightest men round the eastern limb of that wood, and bring me word what 'tis that glittered but now above the trees.—Go yourself too, and use your eyes."

The man obeyed, with the promptitude of one accustomed to serve a quick and imperative Lord; and the little manœuvre the Knight had commanded was performed with all the precision he could desire. In the mean while, he resumed the conversation with Arthur and Savary de Maulèon, who—cooled by the momen-

tary pause, and also somewhat soothed by something flattering, he scarce knew what, in the idea of the sort of avarice of glory De Coucy had attributed to him — replied to the young Knight with more cordiality than he had at first evinced. In a very few minutes, the horsemen, who had been detached, returned at full gallop. Their report was somewhat startling. A large body of horse, they said, whose spear-heads De Coucy had seen above the low trees, were skirting slowly round the wood towards them. Full a hundred knights, with barbed horses and party pennons, had been seen. There appeared more behind ; and the whole body, with the squires, archers, and servants of arms, might amount to fifteen hundred. No banner, however, was displayed ; but one of the Brabançois declared, that he knew the foremost to be King John's Norman knights, by the fashion of their hauberts, and the pikes on their horses' heads.

“ Give me my lance and casque !” cried De

Coucy.—“ Sir Savary de Maulèon, I leave the Prince under your care, while I, with my Brabançois and followers, give these gentry the meeting at the corner of the wood. You would not be mad enough in this business to risk the Prince with four hundred men and forty knights, against one hundred knights and fifteen hundred men !”

“ Surely not,” replied Savary de Maulèon ; “ but still I go with you myself, beau Sire.”

“ No ! as you are a Knight,” cried De Coucy, grasping his hand, “ I charge you, stay with the Prince, cover his march to Tours ; keep all the knights with you, for you will want them all. You start fair with the enemy—the distance is about equal to the city ; and I promise you, that if they pass yon turn of the wood within this quarter of an hour, 'tis over my dead body—let it be so, Sir Knight, in God's name ! The honour will rest with him who gets the Prince safe to Tours. Is not that enough ? You have the post of honour.”

“ And you the post of danger,” said Savary de Maulèon, shaking his head.

“ Mind not you that !” cried De Coucy, whose casque was by this time fixed. “ If these be Normans, there will be danger and honour enough too, before you reach Tours ;” and grasping his lance, he fell back to the band of Brabançois, put himself at their head, and galloped at full speed to the turning of the wood.

Before coming in sight of the enemy, however, De Coucy paused, and advancing so far alone as to gain a sight of them, he perceived that their numbers, though they had been somewhat exaggerated, were still too great to admit the chance of fighting them with any hope of success. His object therefore was to delay them on their march as long as he could ; and then to retreat fighting, so as to cover the Prince’s march upon Tours. Accordingly he commanded the Cotereaux to spread out, in such a manner that the iron of their spears

might just be seen protruding from the wood, and by patting his horse's neck, and touching him with the spur, he made him utter one or two loud neighs, for the purpose of calling the attention of the enemy, which the sound of their galloping thither did not seem to have done.

The stratagem had its effect: the whole body of horse, who were approaching, halted; and after a few minutes' consultation, a reconnoitring party was thrown out, who approached in front of De Coucy's party, and fell back again instantly on their main body. “Ground your spears!” cried De Coucy; “unsling your bows; have each man his arrow on the string, and the string to his ear, and give them such a flight as shall dizzy them whenever they come near.”

The Brabançois obeyed: each man rested his spear, which, by the way, was distinguished in many respects from the knight's lance,—threw his bridle over his arm, and drew his bowstring

to his ear ; while De Coucy advanced a few paces, to observe the motions of the enemy. To his surprise, however, he observed half a dozen knights ride out, while the rest stood still ; and in a moment after displaying the banner of Hugues de Lusignan, they advanced at full speed, crying loudly, “ Artus Anjou ! Artus Anjou ! ”—the rallying cry which the Knights of Anjou attached to the party of Arthur had adopted.

“ Hold ! hold ! ” cried De Coucy, waving his hand to his archers. “ Here must be some mistake. These are friends. So, indeed, it proved ; and, on a nearer approach, De Coucy found that the body of troops which had caused the alarm, had in truth come forth from Tours, for the protection of Arthur, whom they had long known to be approaching with but a small force ; while King John, with a considerable army, was reported to be ravaging the county of Maine. The cause of the mistake also was now explained. Some knights of Normandy,

either moved by the justice of Arthur's claims, or disgusted with the weak levity and cowardly baseness of John, had crossed the country; and, joining the troops of Hugues le Brun, and Godefroy de Lusignan, under the command of Ruoal d'Issoudun, Count d'Eu, had come out to give the sovereign they had determined to acknowledge, welcome and protection.

These communications were much sooner made than they are written; and De Coucy, whose banner had been seen and recognised by the reconnoitring party, was received by the assembled Knights, with no small marks of honour and esteem. His troops had of course now to make a retrograde motion, but no great haste was necessary to overtake the body he had before left; for Savary de Maulèon had taken such good care that his retreat should not appear like a flight, that the messenger to De Coucy despatched to inform him of the change of aspect which affairs had undergone, reached the small body of Knights who had remained

with Arthur, before they had proceeded half a mile.

The meeting of the two bands was a joyous one on both sides, and nothing was now talked of amongst the Knights of Anjou and Poitou but proceeding instantly to active and energetic operations against the enemy. De Coucy was silent, well knowing that a council must be held on the subject after their arrival at Tours; and reserving his opinion for that occasion, though he well saw that his single voice would be drowned amidst the many, which were all eager to urge a course that, under any other circumstances, he would have been the first to follow, but which, where the stake was a kingdom, and the hazard great, he did not feel himself justified in approving.

While things were thus proceeding, in front of the army, the Brabançois, who now occupied a much less important station than when they formed, as it were, the main body of the Prince's force, followed at some little distance

in the rear. A few steps in advance of this troop rode Jodelle, particularly affecting to have no private communication with his men ; but, on the contrary, sometimes riding up to Hugo de Barre, who bore De Coucy's standard on the right, and with whom he had become a great favourite ; and sometimes jesting with Gallon the Fool, whose regard he strove not a little to cultivate, though it was not less difficult to ascertain exactly which way the cracked juggler's esteem turned, than it was to win his affection at all, which was no easy task.

“ Ha, ha ! Sire Jodelle !” cried Gallon, coming close to him, as they began to move forward towards Tours — “ Haw, haw ! A goodly body of prisoners our Lord has taken to-day !” and he pointed to the band of Knights which had so lately joined their own. “ And yet,” added Gallon, bringing his two eyes to bear with a sly leer upon Jodelle's face, “ our Lord does not often make prisoners. He contents himself with dashing his foemen's brains out with his battle-axe, as he did in Auvergne.”

Jodelle grasped his sword, and muttered something to himself. Gallon's eyes, however, were like the orbs in an orrery, for an instant close together, and then, by some unapparent machinery, thrown far apart; and before Jodelle could determine what their first expression meant, they were straggling out again on each side of the head in which they were placed, and the shrewd meaning leer was changed at once into the most broad senseless vacancy.

"Oh! it would have done your heart good, Sire Jodelle," continued the jongleur, "to see how he hewed their noddles.—Haw, haw! Oh, rare!—But, as I was saying," continued he, in his flighty, rambling way, "your's must be a merry trade, and a thriving."

"Our's is no trade, Maître Gallon," replied Jodelle, speaking calmly, to conceal no very amicable sensations which he felt towards the jongleur—"our's is no trade; 'tis a profession,—the noble profession of arms."

"No trade!" exclaimed Gallon.—"Haw, haw! Haw, haw! If you make no trade of

it, with such merchandise as you have, you are not fit to hold a sow by the ear, or soap a cat's tail. Why ! Do you not buy and sell ?”

“ Buy and sell !” said Jodelle, pondering. “ Faith ! I am heavy this morning. What should I buy or sell, either ?”

“ Lord now ! Lord now !” cried Gallon, holding up both his hands. “ To think that there is another man in all the world so stupid as my master and myself!—What should you buy and sell ? Why what better merchandise would you desire to sell to King John,” he added, making his horse sidle up against the chief of the Brabançois, so that he could speak without being overheard by any one else,—“ what better merchandise would you desire to sell to King John, than that fat flock of sheep before you, with the young ram, and his golden fleece, at the head of them ;— and what would you desire better to buy, than white English silver, and yellow English gold ?”

Jodelle looked in his face, to see if he could gather any thing from that; but all was one flat, dead blank; even his very nose was still and meaningless— one might as well have expected such words of devilish cunning from a stone wall.

“ But my oath—my honour !” cried Jodelle, gazing on him still.

“ Your oath !—Haw, haw !” shouted Gallon, convulsed with laughter,—“ your honour !—Haw, haw ! haw, haw ! haw, haw !” And rolling about, as if he would have fallen from his horse, he galloped on, shouting, and roaring, and laughing, and screaming, till there was not a man in the army did not turn his head to look at the strange being who dared to interrupt with such obstreperous merriment their leader’s conversation.

De Coucy well knew the sounds, and turned to chide; but Arthur, who had been before amused with Gallon’s humour, called him to approach for the purpose of jesting with him,

with that boyish susceptibility of absurdities which characterised the age.

Gallon was as much at his ease amongst princes and barons as amongst peasants and serving men ; and, seeming to forget all that he had just been speaking of, he dashed off into some new strain of eccentricity better suited to his auditors.

Jodelle, who, trembling for the result, had so far forgot himself as to ride on to listen, now rendered secure by the juggler's flighty change of topic, dropped back into the rear, and the whole cavalcade moved gently on to Tours. .

While preparing for the Prince's banquet in the evening, the place at De Coucy's elbow was filled by Gallon the Fool, who, somewhat in a more sane and placable humour than usual, amused his lord with various tales and anecdotes, neither so disjointed nor so disfigured as his relations usually were. The last, however, which he thought fit to tell—what he had over-

heard through the unglazed window of the Hermit's cell on the night before the party of Arthur quitted Paris, caused De Coucy instantly to write a few words to the Count d'Auvergne, and putting it in the hands of his page, he bade him ride for his life, and deliver the letter wherever he should find the Count, were it even in the presence of the King himself. The fatigued state of the horses prevented the lad from setting out that night, but by daylight next morning he was in the saddle, and away upon a journey which we may have cause to trace more particularly hereafter.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER a long consultation with De Coucy, the morning following their arrival at Tours, Arthur Plantagenet proceeded to hold his first regular council of war. Endowed with a thousand graces of person and of mind, Arthur had still that youthful indecision of character, that facility of yielding, which leads the lad so often to do what the man afterwards bitterly repents of.

Arthur entered the council room of the Bishop's palace at Tours, fully determined to adhere to the more prudent plan of waiting for the large reinforcements he expected. He took his seat with the proud dignity of a Plantage-

net ; and though his youthful countenance was in feature and in complexion almost feminine, and his brows were only ornamented with the ducal coronet of Brittany, still, in port and expression, he was every inch a king. There was a dead silence amongst the Knights for a moment or two after he had entered, while Arthur spoke a few words to the Bishop of Tours, who stood on the right-hand of the large throne or chair, in which he was seated. The Prince then turned towards the council ; and, with somewhat of a heightened colour, but with a clear tone and unembarrassed manner, he spoke.

“ Illustrious Lords,” he said, “ whose valour and wisdom have gained Poitou and Anjou a name with the whole world ; as your inferior, both in age and reason, in warlike experience and in prudent sagacity, I come to you for advice and counsel, how to carry forward the great enterprise I have undertaken. We are here, not much above an hundred knights ;

and our whole forces do not amount to two thousand men ; while John, my usurping uncle, is within a few days' march, with ten times our number of men, and full two thousand valiant and renowned knights. To balance this disparity, however, King Philip, my noble and bountiful God-father in arms, has given me, for my auxiliaries and allies, **Hervey de Donzy**, Count de Nevers, surnamed the Blunt, the valiant **Hugues de Dampierre**, with all the Knights of Berri, and **Imbert Baron de Beaujeur**, with many a noble baron from the other side of the Loire. These knights arrive to-day at Orleans, and in three days will be here. At the same time, my Duchy of Brittany, so faithful to me in all times, sends me five hundred valiant knights, and four thousand men-at-arms, who to-morrow at the latest will be at Nantes. It seems to me, therefore, the wisest plan we can pursue—if you, whose wisdom and experience are greater than mine, do not think otherwise—to remain here at least four days.

Often, a short delay produces the greatest benefit ; and a wise man of antiquity has said, that it is not the evils which happen that we should struggle to avoid, but those that may happen. Let us also remember, that—though, Heaven knows ! no one, or old or young, shall in open warfare more expose their person than I will do ; or less cares for life than I do, if it be not life with honour ;—but still let us remember, that it is my person alone my uncle seeks, because I demand my kingdom, and the freedom of my imprisoned sister.* You all know his cruelty, and I call Heaven to witness, that I would rather, now, each man here should sheathe his dagger in my body, than suffer me to fall into the hands of my bloody and unnatural relation.

By letters received last night from the good King Philip, I am informed that John has just

* Eleanor Plantagenet, who was detained till her death, to cut off all chance of subsequent heirs in the line of Geoffrey Plantagenet, John's elder brother.

seized upon the citadel of Dol, the garrison of which he has put to death after their surrender, the soldiers by the sword, the knights he has crucified. The King also assures me, that the usurper is marching hitherward, with all haste ; and farther counsels me, to conduct myself with prudence rather than rashness ; and to wait the arrival of the reinforcements, which will give me a disposable force of fifteen hundred knights and thirty thousand men.”

Arthur paused ; and Savary de Maulèon instantly replied :—“ Let not the counsels of any one alarm you, beau Sire. To cowards be delay ; to men of courage, action. John is marching towards us. Let him come ; we shall be glad to see him for once show a spark of valour. No, no, beau Sire, he will not come. Does he not always fly from the face of arms ? He is a coward himself, and the spirit of the Prince spreads always through the army. For us, be quick and decided action ; and, before this weak and treacherous usurper shall know, even,

that we are in the field, let us strike some blow, that shall carry panic to his fearful heart. His bad and wicked mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, is even now shut up in the town and castle of Mirebeau. The garrison is not large, though commanded by William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury. Let us hasten thither instantly, besiege the castle ; and, before John shall have notice of our movements, his mother, the instigator and abettor of one half his wickedness, shall be in our power. Or even say that the castle holds out, our reinforcements may join us there, as well as here, and then success is certain."

The multitude of voices that applauded this proposal drowned all opposition ; and though De Coucy pressed but for the delay of a day, to wait the arrival of his own forces, levied in the King's name on the lands of the Count de Tankerville, and which alone would have doubled their present numbers, both of knights and of servants of arms, his proposition was negatived. Arthur yielded to the current ; and,

catching the ardour of the Poitevins, his eyes sparkled at the idea of surprising Mirebeau, and holding captive that bad Queen, who had been the incessant persecutor of his mother, and had acted but the part of a stepdame, even to her own son, his father.

De Coucy saw that farther opposition was vain, and bent the whole energies of his mind to ensure success, even to the scheme he had disapproved.

The Knights and Barons of Poitou had reasonably enough wondered to see a young warrior, whose greatest fame had been gained by the very rashness of his courage, become the counsellor of caution and delay ; but De Coucy was rash only of his own person, holding that a knight ought never even to consider his own individual life, or that of his followers ; but should give the whole thought and prudence which he abstracted from himself, to carry forward successfully the object of his undertaking.

He never once dreamed of personal danger ; nor could he conceive the idea of any man bestowing a thought upon the hazard to which any enterprise exposed him : and thus, in contemplating an approaching struggle, the whole powers of his mind were bent upon conquering his enemies, and his care for himself was only as a means to that effect.

If the wonder of the Knights of Poitou had been excited by De Coucy's former slowness in counselling enterprise, it was far, far more so to behold his activity and energy now that action had really commenced.

He became suddenly, as it were, the soul and spirit of their enterprise : his eye was every where ; his quick and capable mind seemed continually acting on every side around them. Whatever tidings was demanded of any part of their disjointed force, it was Sir Guy de Coucy knew ; — whatever information was required concerning the country before them, De Coucy had already made himself master of it ;—what-

ever movement was to be made by any body of the troops, De Coucy saw it done ;—whatever provision was to be brought in for the supply of the army, De Coucy assured himself that it was executed, as far as the brief time permitted. He had recommended delay ; but as action had been decided upon, he put forth the whole energetic activity of his soul to render action effective.

Understanding thoroughly the character and application of all the various classes of troops made use of in that day, De Coucy took care that his Brabançois should be turned to that service for which they were best calculated. As reconnoitring parties they were invaluable ; and, as the army advanced upon Mirebeau, by spreading them over the face of the country, he gained information of every thing that was passing around.

Two messengers from Eleanor of Aquitaine to her son were thus intercepted ; and it was discovered from the letters they bare, that she

had already obtained knowledge of Arthur's movements, and beseeched John to hasten to her relief; telling him, that though the castle she held might be looked upon as nearly impregnable, yet the suddenness of attack had prevented her from providing for the garrison, sufficiently, at least, for any long siege.

Such news was not lost on De Coucy; and, employing his Brabançois as marauders, in which point of duty they certainly did not fail, he swept the whole country round about of every sort of provisions, both to distress the enemy, and to supply his own troops. This service became one of danger as they approached nearer to the town, the parties of William Longsword being also scattered about on the same errand; and the whole of the morning before their arrival was spent in fierce and continual skirmishes,—now for a drove of bullocks,—now for a cart of wine,—now for a load of wheat.

At length, all the parties of Normans and

English were driven within the gates of the town ; and the army of Arthur, sitting down before it, invested it on all sides.

We must remember, however, that what were called towns in those days might consider it a high honour to be compared even to a small English borough of the present times ; so that it was no impossible thing for an army of two thousand men to invest even a town and castle.

A council of war was instantly held, and De Coucy's voice was no longer for delay. Immediate attack of the town was his advice ; and though many observed that only four hours of daylight remained, he still pressed his object, declaring that, if well seconded, he would place his standard in the market-place before dark. Those who had before reproached him with procrastination, dared not oppose him now, and orders were instantly issued for the attack of the walls.

The whole space occupied by the houses of Mirebeau was encompassed by a strong curtain of rough stone, flanked with tall round towers, at

the distance of an arrow's flight from each other; so that every part of the wall, though unguarded by a ditch, could be defended, not only from its own projecting battlements, but by the cross fire of missiles from the towers. Both men and munition of war seemed plenty within; for, on the first symptoms of a general attack, the walls became thronged with slingers and bowmen; and numbers of labourers might be seen lighting fires for boiling oil or water, or carrying up baskets of heavy stones, logs of wood, and quantities of quick-lime, to cast down upon the assailants' heads, and crush them, or blind them, if the flights of arrows proved insufficient to keep them from the gates or the foot of the wall.

The defenders of the battlements, indeed, appeared to be principally burghers mingled with a small proportion of soldiers from the castle; but, although the military citizen was but little esteemed in that day, there was a degree of bustle and promptitude about those

who manned the wall of Mirebeau, which, at all events, indicated zeal in its defence.

The preparations on the part of the besiegers were not less active; and Arthur did all that an inexperienced youth could do, to give unity and consistence to the efforts of his undisciplined and insubordinate forces. It must not, however, be thought that we would say the knights who accompanied him were less regular and obedient than others of their times and class. Far from it. But it must be remembered, that discipline was almost unknown amongst the armies of chivalry, and that the feudal system was felt as much, or more, in times of war, than in times of peace. Each baron commanded the knights and men-at-arms he brought into the field. It is true, he received himself commands from the sovereign, or the person who represented him for the moment; but whether he obeyed those commands or not, depended upon a thousand circumstances; as, whether the monarch was him-

self respected,—whether the orders he gave were to be executed beneath his own eye, and, lastly, whether they suited the taste, or coincided with the opinion, of the person who received them.

In the case of Arthur, every one who followed him thought they had a right not only to counsel, but to act; and the Prince himself, afraid of opposing them, lest they should fall from him before the arrival of the reinforcements placed by Philip more absolutely under his command, could only retain the external appearance of authority, by sanctioning what they themselves proposed.

The tumultuary council held upon the occasion, passed in rapid interjections to somewhat of the following tenor. “Let us divide into three bodies!—Each leader attack a gate.—Hugues le Brun, I join myself to you.—We will to the southern door.—I attack that postern.—Sire de Maulèon, where do you attack?—I undertake the great gate; that is, if the beau Sire Arthur so commands.”

“Certainly, beau Sire! I think it will be advisable; but, at all events, let the various attacks be simultaneous,” replied the Prince: “let some signal be given when all are ready.”

“True, true! Well bethought, beau Sire! You are an older warrior than any of us.—Sire de Coucy, where do you attack? I see, your men are busy about mantlets and pavisses.”

“I attack that tower,” replied De Couey, pointing to one that, though tall and strong, seemed somewhat more ancient than the wall.

“Ha! you would add another tower to those in your chief,” said Savary de Mauléon, “but you will fail. We have no ladders. Better come with me to the gate. Well, as you will.—Sire Geoffroy de Lusignan, speed round with your force, and shoot up a lighted arrow when you are ready.—Where do you bestow yourself, beau Sire Arthur?”

“If the Prince will follow my counsel,” said Hugues le Brun, “he will hover round with the men-at-arms which were given him by the

King, and bestow his aid wherever he sees it wanted."

"Or keep on that high ground," said Geoffroy de Lusignan, "and send your commands to us, according as you see the action turn."

Arthur bowed his head ; and all the knights rode off towards the different points they had chosen for their attack, except De Coucy, the tower he had marked being exactly opposite the spot where they had held their council, if such it could be called.

"They would fain prevent my fighting," said Arthur, turning to De Coucy, and speaking still in a low voice, as if fearful of some one hearing, who might oppose his purpose ; "but they will be mistaken.—Sire de Coucy, I pray you, as good knight and true, let me fight under your honourable banner."

"To your heart's content, my Prince," replied the Knight, "By Heaven ! I would not keep you from the noble game before us, for very shame's sake ! — Hugo de Barre, put foot

to the ground, with all my squires, and advance the mantlets. — Have you the pickaxes and the piles all ready?"

" All is ready, beau Sire," replied the Squire; " store of axes and of iron bars."

" Advance then!" cried the Knight, springing to the ground. " Captain Jodelle, dismount your men, and cover us under your arrows as we advance."

" But the signal has not been given from the other side," said Arthur. " Had you not better wait, Sir Guy?"

" We have more to do than they have," replied the Knight; " and besides they having left us, and we beginning the attack, the Normans will think our's a false one, and will not repel us so vigorously, more especially as we direct our efforts against a tower instead of a gate; but they are deceived. I see a crevice there in the very base of the wall, that will aid us shrewdly.—Stay here, beau Sire, till I return, and then we will in together."

" Oh! Sire de Coucy," cried the noble youth,

“ you are going to fight without me.—Do not ! do not deceive me, I pray you !”

“ On my honour, gallant Prince,” said De Coucy, grasping his hand, “ I will not strike a stroke, except against stone walls, till you strike beside me ;” and he advanced to the spot where Hugo de Barre, and three other of his men, held up an immense heavy screen of wood-work, just within bow-shot of the walls. Four more of the Knight’s men stood underneath this massy defence, holding all sorts of instruments for mining the wall, as well as several strong piles of wood, and bundles of fagots. As soon as De Coucy joined them, the whole began to move on ; and Jodelle’s Brabançois, advancing at a quick pace, discharged a flight of arrows at the battlements of the tower, which apparently, by the bustle it occasioned, was not without some effect. An instant answer of the same kind was given from the walls, and missiles of all kinds fell like a thick shower of hail.

In the mean while, Arthur stood on the

mound, with some ten or fifteen men-at-arms, who had been placed near him as a sort of body-guard by Philip. From thence he could behold several points destined to be attacked, and see the preparations of more than one of the leaders, for forcing the gates opposite to which they had stationed themselves. But his chief attention still turned towards De Coucy, who was seen advancing rapidly under the immense mantlet of wood he had caused to be constructed, on which the arrows, the bolts, and the stones from the slings, fell in vain. On, on, it bore to the very foot of the tower; but then came, on the part of the besiegers, the more tremendous sort of defence, of hurling down large stones and trunks of trees upon it; so that, more than once, the four strong men by whom it was supported tottered under the weight, and Hugo de Barre himself fell upon his knee.

This last accident, however, proved beneficial; for the inclined position thus given to

the mantlet, caused the immense masses that had been cast down upon it, to roll off; and the Squire rose from his knee with a lightened burden. In the mean time, Jodelle and his companions did good and soldierlike service. It was almost in vain that the defenders of the tower shouted for fresh implements to crush the besiegers. Not a man could show himself for an instant on the walls, but an arrow from the bows of the Brabançois struck him down, or rattled against his armour; and thus the supply of fresh materials was slow and interrupted. In the mean while, De Coucy and his squires laboured without remission at the foundation of the tower. A large crack, with which the sure sapping hand of Time had begun to undermine the wall, greatly facilitated their purpose; and, at every well-aimed and steady blow which De Coucy directed with his pick-axe at the joints of the mortar, some large mass of masonry rolled out, and left a widening breach in the very base of the tower.

At this moment, the signal for the general assault was given, from the other side of the town, by an arrow tipped with lighted tow being shot straight up into the air; and in a moment the whole plain rang with the shouts and cries of the attack and defence.

Arthur could not resist the desire to ride round, for a moment, and see the progress of the besiegers in other points; and animated with the sight of the growing strife, the clanging of the trumpets, and the war-cries of the combatants, his very heart burned to join his hand in the fray, and win at least some part of the honour of the day. De Coucy, however, was his only hope in this respect; and galloping back as fast as he could, after having gazed for a moment at the progress of each of the other parties, he approached so near the point where the Knight was carrying on his operations, that the arrows from the wall began to ring against his armour. Arthur's heart beat joyfully at the very feeling, that he was in the battle; but a

sight now attracted his attention, which engrossed all his hopes and fears, in anxiety for the noble Knight who was there labouring in his behalf.

The masses of wall which De Coucy and his followers had detached had left so large a gap in the solid foundation of the tower, that it became necessary to support it with the large piles of wood, to prevent the whole structure from crushing them beneath its fall, while they pursued their labours. This had just been done, and De Coucy was still clearing away more of the wall, when suddenly a knight, who seemed to have been informed of what was passing, appeared on the battlements of the tower, followed by a number of stout yeomen, pushing along an immense instrument of wood, somewhat like one of the cranes used in loading and unloading vessels. From a high lever above, hung down the whole trunk of a large tree, tipped at the end with iron ; this was brought immediately over the spot where De Coucy's

mantlet concealed himself and his followers from the lesser weapons of the besieged, and, at a sign from the Knight, the lever slowly raised the immense engine in the air.

“Have a care! — have a care! Sire de Coucy!” shouted at once the whole troop of Brabançois, as well as Arthur’s men-at-arms. But before their cry could well reach the Knight, or be understood, the lever was suddenly loosed, and the ponderous mass of wood fell with its iron-shod point upon the mantlet, dashing it to pieces. Hugo de Barre was struck down, with four of the other squires; but De Coucy himself, who was actually in the mine he had dug, with three more of his followers, who were close to the wall, remained untouched. Hugo, however, instantly sprang upon his feet again, but little injured, and three of his companions followed his example; the fourth remained upon the field for ever.

“Back, Hugo! — Back to the Prince, all of you!” cried De Coucy. — “Give me the light, and back!”

The Squires obeyed; and, having placed in the Knight's hand a resin torch which was by this time nearly burnt out, they retreated towards the Brabançois, under a shower of arrows from the walls, which, sped from a good English bow, in more than one instance pierced the lighter armour of De Coucy's Squires, and left marks that remained till death. In the mean while, not a point of De Coucy's armour, as he moved to and fro at the foot of the tower, that was not the mark of an arrow or a quarrel; while the English Knight above, animated his men to every exertion, to prevent him from completing what he had begun.

“A thousand crowns to him who strikes him down!” cried he.—“Villains! cast the stones upon him! On your lives, let him not fire those fagots! or the tower and the town is lost.—Give me an arblast;” and as he spoke, the Knight snatched a cross-bow from one of the yeomen, dressed the quarrel in it, and aimed steadily at the bars of De Coucy's helmet as he

bore forward another bundle of fagots and jammed it into the mine.

The missile struck against one of the bars, and bounded off. “ Well aimed ! William of Salisbury !” cried De Coucy, looking up. “ For ancient love, my old companion in arms, I tell thee to get back from the tower ! for within three minutes it is down !” And so saying, he applied his torch to various parts of the pile of wood he had heaped up in the breach, and retired slowly towards Prince Arthur, with the arrows rattling upon his armour like a heavy shower of hail upon some well-roofed building.

“ Now, my noble Lord,” cried he, “ down from your horse, and prepare to rush on ! By Heaven’s grace ! you shall be the first man in Mirebeau ; for I hear by the shouts, that the others have not forced the gates yet.—Hugo, if thou art not badly hurt with that arrow, range the men behind us.—By the Lord ! William of Salisbury will stay till the tower falls !—See ! they are trying to extinguish the fire by casting

water over, but it is in vain ; the pillars have caught the flame. Hark, how they crack !

As De Coucy spoke, the Earl of Salisbury and his men, seeing that the attempt to put out the fire was useless, retired from the tower. The flame gradually consumed the heaps of loose wood and fagots with which the Knight had filled the mine ; and the strong props of wood with which he had supported the wall as he worked on, caught fire, one after the other, and blazed with intense fury. The besiegers and the besieged watched alike in breathless expectation, as the fire wore away the strength of the wood. Suddenly one of the props gave way ; but only a mass of heated masonry followed. Another broke — the tower tottered — the others snapped short with the weight — the falling mass seemed to balance itself in the air, and struggle, like an overthrown king, to stand for but a moment longer — then down it rushed, with a sound like thunder, and lay a mass of smoking ruins on the plain.

“On! on!” cried De Coucy; “charge before the dust subsides! A Coucy! a Coucy!—St. Michael! St. Michael!” and in an instant he was standing, with Prince Arthur by his side, in the midst of the breach which the fall of the tower had made in the wall and half-way up the sort of causeway formed by its ruins. They passed not, however, unopposed, for William Longsword instantly threw himself before them.

“Up! Prince Arthur! up!” cried De Coucy; “you must be the first.—Set your foot on my knee;” and he bent it to aid the young Prince in climbing a mass of broken wall that lay before him. Arthur sprang up, sword in hand, amidst the smothering cloud of dust and smoke that still hung above the ruins, and his weapon was instantly crossed with that of his uncle, William of Salisbury, his father’s natural brother. At the same moment, De Coucy rushed forward and struck down two of the Norman soldiers who opposed his passage; but then paused, in

order not to abandon Arthur to an old and experienced knight, far more than his match in arms.

For five blows, and their return, De Coucy suffered the Prince to maintain the combat himself, *to win his spurs*, as he mentally termed it. The sixth stroke, however, of William of Salisbury's tremendous sword fell upon Arthur's shoulder; and though the noble lad sturdily bore up, and was not even brought upon his knee, yet the part of his armour where the blow fell, flew into shivers with its force. The Earl lifted his sword again; and Arthur, somewhat dizzied and confused, made a very faint movement to parry it; but instantly De Coucy rushed in, and received the edge of the weapon on his shield.

“ Nobly fought! my Prince!” cried he, covering Arthur with one arm, and returning William Longsword's blow with the other,—“ nobly fought, and knightly done!—Push in with your men-at-arms, and the Brabançois, and leave this one to me.—Now, Salisbury, old

friend, we have stood side by side in Palestine. I love thee as well face to face. Thou art a noble foe. There stands my foot!"

"Brave Coucy! Thou shalt have thy heart's content!" cried the Earl, dealing one of his sweeping blows at the Knight's neck. But he had now met with his equal; and, indeed, so powerful were each of the champions, so skilful in the use of their weapons, and so cool in their contention, that the combat between them was long and undecided. Blow answered blow, with the rapidity of lightning: stroke followed stroke. Their arms struck fire, the crests were shorn from their helmets, the bearings effaced from their shields, and their sur-coats of arms became as tattered as a beggar's gown.

Still, though De Coucy pressed him with impetuous fury, William of Salisbury yielded not a step; and it was only when he saw his followers driven back by the superior number of the Brabançois and men-at-arms, led by

Arthur, that he retired a pace or two, still dealing blows thick and fast at De Coucy ; who followed foot by foot, shouting his battle-cry, and encouraging the men to advance ; while, every now and then, he addressed some word of friendly admiration to his opponent, even in the midst of the deadly strife that he urged so furiously against him.

“ Thou art a good Knight, on my soul, Lord Salisbury !” cried he ; “ yet take that for the despatch of this affair !” and he struck him with the full sway of his blade, on the side of his head, so that the Earl reeled as he stood.

“ Gramercy !” cried William, recovering his equipoise, and letting a blow fall on the Knight’s casque, not inferior in force to the one he had received.

At that moment, however, his troops gave way still farther before the Brabançois ; and at the same time a party of the burghers came rushing from another part of the town, crying

“ The gate is lost ! the gate is lost !—we saw it dashed in !”

“ Then the town is lost too,” said Salisbury coolly.—“ Sound a retreat !” he continued, turning his head slightly to a squire, who stood behind him, watching lest he should be struck down, but forbidden by all the laws of war to interpose between two knights, so long as they could themselves maintain the combat. At the same time, while the Squire, as he had been bidden, sounded a retreat on his horn, William Longsword still continued to oppose himself to the very front of the enemy ; and not till his men were clear, and in full retreat towards the castle, did he seek to escape himself, though he in a degree quitted the personal combat with De Coucy, to cover with some of his bravest men-at-arms the rear of the rest. Now, he struck a blow here ; now felled a Brabançois there ; now, returned for an instant to De Coucy ; and now, rushed rapidly to restore order amongst his retreating troops.

As they quitted the walls, however, and got embarrassed in the streets of the town, the Norman soldiers were every moment thrown into more and more confusion, by the various parties of the burghers who had abandoned the walls, and were flying towards the castle for shelter. Several knights also, and men-at-arms, were seen retreating up the high streets, from the gate which had been attacked by Savary de Maulèon ; just at the moment that De Coucy, rushing on into the market-place, caught his standard from the hands of Hugo de Barre, and struck it into the midst of the great fountain of the town.

The flight of the knights showed sufficiently to Lord Salisbury, that the gate which they had been placed to defend had been forced also ; and his sole care became now to get his men as speedily and as safely within the walls of the castle as possible. This was not so difficult to do ; for though De Coucy and Arthur still hung upon his rear with the men-at-arms, and

a part of the Brabançois, a great majority of the latter, giving way to their natural inclination, dispersed to pursue their ancient avocation of plundering.

A scene of no small horror presented itself at the gates of the castle. Multitudes of the burghers, with their women and children, had crowded thither for safety ; but Eleonor, with the most pitiless cruelty, ordered the garrison to drive them back with arrows, and not to suffer one to enter on pain of death. Their outstretched hands, their heart-rending cries, were all in vain ; the Queen was inexorable ; and more than one had been wounded with the arrows, who had dared to approach the barbican.

When Salisbury and his band came near, however, the multitude, driven to despair by seeing the pursuers following fiercely on his track, made an universal rush to enter along with him ; and it was only by using their swords against the townsmen, and even the women, that the soldiers could clear themselves a passage.

Salisbury was of course the last who passed himself ; and as he turned to enter, while his soldiers formed again within the barbican, two women, of the highest class of the townspeople, clung to his knees, entreating him by all that may move man's heart, to let them follow within the walls.

“ I cannot !—I must not !” exclaimed he harshly ; but then, turning once more, he shouted to De Coucy, who, seeing that farther pursuit was vain, now followed more slowly.

“ Sire de Coucy !” he exclaimed, as if he had been speaking to his dearest friend. “ If you love me, protect this helpless crowd as much as may be. For old friendship's sake, I pray thee !”

“ I will, Salisbury !—I will !” replied De Coucy.—“ Beau Sire Arthur, have I your permission ?”

“ Do what thou wilt, dear friend and noble Knight,” replied the Prince. “ Is there any thing you could ask me now, that I would not grant ?”

“ Stand back then, ho !” cried the Knight, waving his hand to the Brabançois, who were pressing forward towards the trembling crowd of burghers.—“ Stand back ! Who passes that mark is my foe !” and he cast his gauntlet on the ground in the front of the line.

“ We will not be balked of our spoil. The purses of the burghers are ours !” cried several of the free companions ; and one sprang forward from immediately behind De Coucy, and passed the bound he had fixed. That instant, however, the Knight, without seeing or enquiring who he was, struck him a blow in the face with the pommel of his sword, that laid him rolling on the ground with the blood spouting from his mouth and nose. No one made a movement to follow ; and Jodelle—for it was he—rose from the ground, and retired silently to his companions.

De Coucy then advanced with Prince Arthur towards the multitude crowding round the barbican. Immediately the soldiers on the

walls bent their bows ; but the voice of the Earl of Salisbury was heard exclaiming, “Whoever wings a shaft at him dies on the spot !” and De Coucy proceeded to tell the people, that they must, if they hoped to be spared, yield whatever gold or jewels they had about them to the soldiery ; and that all such men as were not clerks, must agree to surrender themselves prisoners ; and pay a fair ransom, such as should be determined afterwards by the Prince’s council.

This matter was soon settled ; the universal cry from the burghers being, in their extremity of fear, “Save our lives !—save our women’s honour !—save our children !—and take gold, or whatever else we possess !” Each one instantly stripped himself of the wealth he had about him ; and this, being collected in a heap, satisfied for the time the rapacity of the soldiers. De Coucy then took measures to secure the lives of the prisoners ; and putting them, by twos and threes, under the protection of the

Prince's men-at-arms and his own squires, he accompanied Arthur to the market-place, followed by the Brabançois, wrangling with each other concerning the distribution of the spoil, and seemingly forgetful of their disappointment in not having been permitted to add bloodshed to plunder.

In the market-place, beside De Coucy's standard, stood Savary de Maulèon, Geoffroy de Lusignan, and several other barons, with three Norman knights as prisoners. The moment De Coucy and Arthur approached, Savary de Maulèon advanced to meet them; and with that generous spirit, which formed one of the brightest points in the ancient knightly character, he pressed the former opponent of his counsels in his mailed arms, exclaiming, “By my faith, Sire de Coucy, thou hast kept thy word! ‘There stands thy banner, an hour before sunset!’ and I proclaim thee, with the voice of all my companions, the lord of this day’s fight.”

“Not so, fair Sir!” replied De Coucy,—“not

so ! There is another, to whom the honour justly belongs,— who first mounted the breach we made in the wall,—who first measured swords with the famous William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, and who, in short, has been the first in all this day's achievements.—Here he stands,” continued the Knight, turning towards the princely youth who stood beside him, blushing to his very brow, both with graceful embarrassment and gratified pride—“here he stands ! and may this conquest of Mirebeau be but the first of those that shall, step by step, give him his whole dominions.—Sound trumpets, sound ! —Long life to Arthur, King of England !”

CHAPTER VII.

JUST six days after the events we have related in our last chapter, Guerin, the good Minister whom we have so often had occasion to notice, was walking up and down under a range of old beech-trees, which, forming the last limit of the forest of Compiègne, approached close to the castle, and waved their wide branches even over part of the royal garden.

Guerin, however, was not within the boundary of the garden; from which the spot he had chosen for his walk, was separated by a palisade and ditch covered towards the castle by a high hedge of shrubs. There was indeed an outlet towards the forest by means of a small postern door, and a slight moveable bridge of

wood, but the key of that gate remained alone with the King ; so that the Minister, to reach the part of the wood in which he walked, must have made a considerable circuit round the castle, and through part of the town itself. His object, probably, in choosing that particular spot, was to enjoy some moments of undisturbed thought, without shutting himself up in the close chambers of a Gothic château. Indeed, the subjects which he revolved in his heart, were of that nature, which one loves to deal with in the open air, where we have free space to occupy the matter, while the mind is differently engaged—strong contending doubts, hesitations between right and wrong, the struggles of a naturally gentle and feeling heart, against the dictates of political necessity.—Such were the guests of his bosom. The topic, which thus painfully busied the Minister's thoughts, was the communication made to him by the good but weak Bishop of Paris, as a consequence of his conversation with Bernard, the hermit of St. Mandé.

To tear the hearts of the King and Queen asunder,—to cast between them so sad an apple of discord as jealousy, especially when he felt convinced that Agnes's love to her husband was as firm as adamant, was a stroke of policy for which the mind of Guerin was hardly framed ; and yet the misery that the interdict had already brought, the thousand, thousand fold that it was yet to bring, could only be done away and averted by such a step. Philip remained firm to resist to the last ; Agnes was equally so to abide by his will, without making any attempt to quit him. In a hundred parts of the kingdom, the people were actually in revolt. The barons were leaguing together to compel the King to submission, or to dethrone him ; and ruin, wretchedness, and destruction, seemed threatening France on every side. The plan proposed by the Canon of St. Berthe's might turn away the storm, and yet Guerin would rather have had his hand struck off, than put it in execution.

Such were the thoughts, and such the con-

tending feelings, that warred against each other in his breast, while he paced slowly up and down before the palisade of the garden ; and yet nothing showed itself upon his countenance but deep, calm thought. He was not one of those men whose features, or whose movements, betray the workings of the mind. There were no wild starts, no broken expressions, no muttered sentences : his corporeal feelings were not sufficiently exciteable for such gesticulations : and the stern retired habits of his life had given a degree of rigidity to his features, which, without effort, rendered them on all ordinary events as immoveable as those of a statue.

On the present occasion, he was followed by a page bearing his sword ; for, as we have before said, during many years after he had been elected to the Bishopric of Senlis, he retained the habit of a knight hospitaller ; but the boy, though accustomed to mark his lord's countenance, beheld nothing there but the usual steady gravity of profound thought.

As he passed backwards and forwards, the voices of two persons conversing in the garden hard by, struck his ear. At first, the speakers were far off, and their tones indistinct ; but gradually they came so near, that their words even would have been perfectly audible, had Guerin been one to play the eaves-dropper ; and then again they passed on, the sounds dying away as they pursued their walk round the garden.

“ The Queen’s voice,” said Guerin to himself ; “ and, if I mistake not, that of the Count D’Auvergne. He arrived at Compiègne last night, by Philip’s own invitation, who expected to have returned from Gournay long since. Pray God, he fail not there ! for one rebuff in war, and all his barons would be upon him at once. I wish I had gone myself ; for he is sometimes rash. If he were to return now, and find this Auvergne with the Queen, his jealousy might perchance spring from his own head. But there is no hope of that : as he came not last night, he will not arrive till evening.”

Such was the course of Guerin's thoughts, when a page, dressed in a bright green tunic of silk, approached, and, addressing himself to the follower of the Minister, asked his way to the garden of the château.

"Why, you must go a mile and more round, by the town, and in at the great gates of the castle," replied Guerin's page.—"What do you seek in the garden?"

"I seek the Count d'Auvergne," replied the youth, "on business of life and death; and they told me that he was in the garden behind the château, close by the forest.—My curse upon all misleaders!" and he turned to re-tread his steps through the town.

Guerin had not heeded this brief conversation, but had rather quickened his pace, to avoid hearing what was said by the Queen and the Count d'Auvergne, who at the moment were passing, as we have said, on the other side of the palisade, and spoke loud, in the full confidence that no human ears were near. A few

words, however, forced themselves upon his hearing.

“And such was my father’s command and message,” said Agnes in a sorrowful tone.

“Such, indeed, it was, lady,” replied the Count d’Auvergne; “and he bade me entreat and conjure you, by all that is dear and sacred between parent and child—”

Guerin, as we have said, quickened his pace; and what the unhappy Count d’Auvergne added was lost, at least to him. Sufficient time had just elapsed, to allow the speakers in the garden to turn away from that spot and take the sweep towards the castle, when the sound of horse was heard approaching. Guerin advanced to the end of one of the alleys, and to his surprise beheld the King, followed by about a dozen men-at-arms, coming towards the castle in all haste.

Before he reached the spot where Guerin stood, Philip dismounted, and gave his bridle to one of the squires. “I will through the

garden," said he:—" go you round to the gates as quietly as possible—I would not have the poor Burgesses know that I am returned, or I shall have petitions and lamentations about this accursed interdict,—petitions that I cannot grant—lamentations that I would not hear."

The Squire took the bridle, and, in obedience to the King's commands, turned another way with the rest of the party; while Philip advanced slowly, with his brow knit, and his eyes fixed on the ground. He did not observe his Minister; and, as he came onward, it was easy to read deep, powerful, painful thought in every line of his countenance. Twice he stopped, as he advanced, with his look still bent upon the earth, and remained gazing thereon, without word or motion, for several minutes. It would have seemed that he paused to remark some moss and wild flowers, gathered together at his feet, had not his frowning forehead, and stern, fixed eye, as well as the mournful shake of the head, with which his pause still ended,

told that sadder and more bitter contemplations were busy in his mind.

The last time he stopped was within ten paces of Guerin, and yet he did not see him, so deeply occupied were all his thoughts. At length, unclasping his arms, which had been folded over his breast, he clenched his hands tight, exclaiming, “Happy, happy Saladin ! Thou hast no meddling priest to disturb thy domestic joys !—By Heaven ! I will embrace thy creed and worship Mahound !”

As he spoke, he raised his eyes, and they instantly rested on the figure of his Minister. “Ha, Guerin !” cried the King, “has the interdict driven thee forth from the city ?”

“Not so, Sire,” replied the Minister. “I came forth to meditate here in silence, over what might be done to raise it.—Get thee gone, boy !” he continued, turning to his page. “Hie thee to the castle, and leave me with the King.”

“Oh ! Guerin !” said Philip, pursuing his own

train of thought,—“oh! Guerin! think of these base Barons! these disloyal Knights!—After all their empty enthusiasm!—after all their vain boastings!—after all their lying promises!—falling off from me now, in my moment of need! like flies frightened from a dead carcase by the wings of a raven.—And the Bishops too!—the goodly, saintly, fickle, treacherous pack, frightened by the very hum of Rome’s vulture wings!—they leave me in the midst of the evil they have made!—But, by the Lord above! they shall suffer for their treason! Bishops and Barons! they shall feel this interdict as deeply as I do. Their treachery and cowardice shall fill my treasury, and swell my crown’s domains; and they shall find that Philip knows how to make their punishment increase his power.—Gournay has fallen, Guerin,” continued the King, “without the loss of a man. I cut the high sluices and overwhelmed them in the waters of their own artificial lake. Walls, and turrets, and buttresses, gave way before the rushing inun-

dation, like straws before the sickle. Half Normandy has yielded without resistance ; and I might have come back joyful, but that in every town as I passed, it was murmurs, and petitions, and lamentations on the foul interdict. —They brought out their dead,” proceeded Philip, grasping Guerin’s arm,—“they brought out their dead, and laid them at my feet ! They lined the streets with the dying, shrieking for the aid of religion.— Oh ! Guerin ! my friend ! ’tis very horrible ! — very, very, very horrible !”

“ It is indeed, Sire !” said Guerin solemnly, “ most horrible ! and I am sorry to increase your affliction by telling you, that, by every courier that arrives, the most alarming accounts are brought from the various provinces of your kingdom, speaking of nothing but open rebellion and revolt.”

“ Where ?” cried Philip Augustus, his eyes flashing fire. “ Where ? Who dares revolt against the will of their Liege Sovereign ?”

“ In fifty different points of the kingdom the populace are in arms, Sire !” replied the Minister. “ I will lay the details before you at your leisure. Many of the Barons, too, remonstrate in no humble tone.”

“ We will march against them, Guerin,—we will march against them,” replied the King firmly, “ and Serfs and Barons shall learn they have a lord.”

As he spoke, he advanced a few paces towards the garden, then paused, and drawing forth a scrap of parchment, he put it into Guerin’s hand. “ I found that on my table at Gournay,” said the King. “ ’Tis strange ! Some enemy of the Count d’Auvergne has done it !”

Guerin looked at the paper, and beheld, written evidently in the hand of the canon of St. Berthe’s, which he well knew: “ Sir King, beware of the Count d’Auvergne !” The Minister, however, had no time to make any reply; for the sound of the voices in the garden began

again to approach, and Philip instantly recognised the tones of Agnes de Meranie.

“ ‘Tis the Queen,” said he, — “ ‘Tis Agnes !” and as he spoke that beloved name, all the cares and sorrows that, in the world, had gathered round his noble brow, like morning clouds about the high peak of some proud mountain, rolled away, like those same clouds before the risen sun, and his countenance beamed with more than usual happiness.

Guerin had by no means determined how to act, though he decidedly leaned towards the scheme of the canon of St. Berthe’s; but the radiant gladness of Philip’s eye at the very name of Agnes de Meranie, strangely shook all the Minister’s conclusions, and he remained more than ever in doubt.

“ Hark !” cried Philip, in some surprise. “ There is the voice of a man !—To whom does she speak ? Know you, Guerin ?”

“ I believe — I believe, Sire,” replied the Minister, really embarrassed and undecided

how to act,—“ I believe it is the Count d’Auvergne.”

“ You believe! — you believe!” cried the King, the blood mounting into his face, till the veins of his temples swelled out in wavy lines upon his clear skin.—“ The Count d’Auvergne! You hesitate—you stammer, Sir Bishop!—you that never hesitated in your days before.—What means this?—By the God of Heaven! I will know!” — and drawing forth the key of the postern, he strode towards it. But at that moment the sound of the voices came nearer and nearer — It was irresistible — The King paused.

Agnes was speaking, and somewhat vehemently. “ Once for all, beau Sire d’Auvergne,” she said, “ urge me no more; for, notwithstanding all you say — notwithstanding all my own feelings in this respect, I must not — I cannot — I will not — quit my husband. That name alone, my husband, were enough to bind me to him by every duty; and I will never quit him!”

What were the feelings of Philip Augustus as he heard such words, combined with the hesitation of his Minister, with the warning he had received, and with the confused memory of former suspicions ! The thoughts that rushed through his brain had nearly driven him to madness. “ She loves me not !” he thought. “ She loves me not — after all I have done, and sacrificed for her ! She is coldly virtuous—but she loves me not ;—she owns, her feelings take part with her seducer !—but she will not leave me, for duty’s sake !—Hell and fury ! I, that have adored her ! She loves me not !—Oh God ! she loves me not !—But he, — he — shall not escape me ! No,—I will wring his heart of its last drop of blood ! I will trample it under my feet !”

His wild straining eye,—the almost bursting veins of his temples,—the clenching of his hands, —but more, the last words, which had found utterance aloud — showed evidently to Guerin the dreadfully over-wrought state of the King’s

mind ; and, casting himself between Philip and the postern as he rushed towards it, he firmly opposed the monarch's passage, kneeling at his feet, and clasping his knees in his still vigorous arms.

“ Some one is coming, Count d'Auvergne !” Agnes was heard to say hastily. “ Begone ! leave me ! — Never let me hear of this again ! Begone, Sir, I beg !”

“ Unclasp me,” cried the King, struggling to free himself from Guerin's hold. “ Thou knew'st it too, vile confidant ! Base betrayer of your Sovereign's honour !—Unclasp me, or by Heaven ! you die as you kneel !—Away ! I say !” and, drawing his sword, he raised his arm over the Hospitaller's head.

“ Strike, Sire !” cried Guerin undauntedly, clasping the Monarch's knees still more firmly in his arms—“ strike your faithful servant ! His blood is yours—take it ! You cannot wound his heart more deeply with your weapon, than you have done with your words—Strike ! I am

unarmed ; but here will I lie, between you and your mad passion, till you have time to think what it is to slay a guest, whom you yourself invited, in your own halls—before you know whether he be guilty or not.”

“ Free me, Guerin !” said Philip more calmly, but still with bitter sternness. “ Free me, I say ! I am the King once more ! Nay, hold not by my haubert, man !”

Guerin rose, saying, “ I beseech you, Sire, consider !” But Philip put him aside with a strong arm ; and, passing over the bridge, entered the garden by the postern gate.

“ Now, God forgive us all, if we have done amiss in this matter ; and surely if I have inflicted pain, it has not been without suffering it too.” Such was the reflection of the good Bishop of Senlis, when left by Philip : but although his heart was deeply wrung to see the agony of a man he loved, and to be thereof even a promoter, he was not one to waste his moments in fruitless regrets ; and, passing

through the postern, which the King had neglected to shut, he proceeded, as fast as possible, towards the castle, in order to govern the circumstances, and moderate Philip's wrath, as much as the power of man might do.

In the mean while, Philip had entered the garden with his sword drawn, and passing through the formal rows of flowering shrubs, which was the taste of that day, he stood for an instant at the top of the large square of ground which lay between him and the castle. Half the way down on the left side, his eye caught the form of Agnes de Meranie; but she was alone, save inasmuch as two of her ladies, following at about a hundred yards' distance, could be said to keep her company. Without turning towards her, Philip passed through a long arcade of trellis-work which ran along the wall to the right, and, with a pace of light, made his way to the castle.

On the steps he paused, replaced his sword in the sheath, and, passing through one of the

lesser towers, in a minute after, stood in the midst of the great hall. The men-at-arms started up from their various occupations and amusements, and stood marvelling at the unannounced coming of the King; more than one of them taxing themselves internally with some undisclosed fault, and wondering if this unusual visitation portended a reproof.

“Has the Count d’Auvergne been seen?” demanded Philip in a tone which he meant to be calm, but which, though sufficiently rigid—if such a term may be applied to sound—still betrayed more agitation than he imagined—“Has the Count d’Auvergne been seen?”

“He passed but this instant, Sire,” replied one of the serjeants, “with a page habited in green, who has been searching for him this hour.”

“Seek him!” cried the King in a voice that needed no repetition; and the men-at-arms vanished in every direction from the hall, like dust scattered by the wind. During their

absence, Philip strode up and down the pavement, his arms ringing as he trod, while the bitter gnawing of his nether lip showed but too plainly the burning passions that were kindled in his bosom. Every now and then, too, he would pause at one of the doors, throw it wide open—look out, or listen for a moment, and then resume his perturbed pacing in the hall.

In a few minutes, however, the Bishop of Senlis entered, and approached the King. Philip passed him by, knitting his brow, and bending his eyes on the ground, as if resolved not to see him. Guerin, notwithstanding his frown, came nearer, respectfully but boldly ; and the King was obliged to look up. “Leave me, Sir Guerin,” said he. “I will speak with thee anon. Answer not ; but leave me, for fear of worse.”

“ Whatever worse than your displeasure may happen, Sire,” replied Guerin, “ I must abide it—claiming, however, the right of com-

mitting the old servant's crime, and speaking first, if I am to be chidden after."

Philip crossed his arms upon his broad chest, and with a stern brow looked the Minister full in the face; but remained silent, and suffered him to continue.

" You have this day, my Lord," proceeded Guerin, with unabated boldness, " used hard terms towards a faithful subject and an ancient friend; but you have conferred the great power upon me, of forgiving my King. My Lord, I do forgive you, for thinking that the man who has served you truly for twenty years,—since when first, in the boyish hand of fifteen, you held an unsteady sceptre,—would now betray your honour himself, or know it betrayed without warning you thereof. True, my Lord, I believed the Count d'Auvergne to be at the moment of your arrival in the castle gardens with your royal Queen.—"

The King's lip curled, but he remained silent. " Nevertheless," continued Guerin, " so

“ God help me, as I did and do believe he meant no evil towards you, beau Sire; and nought but honourable friendship towards the Queen.”

“ Good man !” cried the King, his lip curling with a sneer, doubly bitter, because it stung himself as well as him to whom it was addressed. “ Guerin, Guerin, thou art a good man!—too good, as the world goes !”

“ Mock me, Sire, if you will,” replied the Minister, “ but hear me still. I knew the Count d’Auvergne to be the dear friend of this lady’s father—the sworn companion in arms of her dead brother: and I doubted not that, as he lately comes from Istria, he might be charged to enforce towards the Queen herself, the same request that her father made to you by letter, when first he heard that the divorce was annulled by the See of Rome—namely, that his daughter might return to his court, and not be made both the subject and sacrifice of long protracted disputes with the Supreme Pontiff.”

“ Ha !” said the King, raising his hand thoughtfully to his brow. “ Say’st thou ?” and for several minutes he remained in deep meditation. “ Guerin, my friend,” said he at length, raising his eyes to the Minister as he comprehended at once the Hospitaller’s motive for gladly yielding way to such a communication between the Count d’Auvergne and Agnes as that of which he spoke—“ Guerin, my friend, thou hast cleared thyself of all but judging ill. Thy intentions—as I believe from my soul they always are—were right. I did thee wrong. Forgive me, good friend, in charity ; for, even among kings, I am very, very unhappy !” and he stretched out his hand towards his Minister.

Guerin bent his lips to it in silence ; and the King proceeded :—

“ In clearing thyself too, thou hast mingled a doubt with my hatred of this Thibalt d’Auvergne ; but thou hast not taken the thorn from my bosom. She may be chaste as ice, Guerin.—Nay, she is. Her every word, her

every look speaks it—even her language to him was beyond doubt—but still, she loves me not, Guerin! She spoke of duty—but she never spoke of love! She, who has been my adoration—she, who loved me, I thought, as kings are seldom loved—she loves me not!"

Guerin was silent. He felt that he could not conscientiously say one word to strengthen the King's conclusion, that Agnes did not love him; but for the sake of the great object he had in view, of raising the interdict, and thereby freeing France from all the dangers that menaced her, he forbore to express his firm conviction of the Queen's deep attachment to her husband.

Fortunately for his purpose, at this moment one or two of the King's serjeants-at-arms returned, informing Philip, with no small additions of surprise, that they could find no trace of the Count d'Auvergne.

"Let better search be made!" said the King; "and the moment he is found, let him

be arrested in my name, and confined, under strict guard, in the chapel tower. Let his usage be good, but his prison sure. Your heads shall answer!" Thus saying, he turned and left the hall, followed by Guerin, who dared not urge his remonstrances farther at the moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT may be necessary here to go back a little, in order to show more fully what had really been that conversation between Thibalt d'Auvergne and the fair Agnes de Meranie, of which but a few words have yet reached the reader's ears.

The Count d'Auvergne had come to the castle of Compiègne, as we have shown, upon the direct invitation of the King himself; and, indeed, Philip had taken more than one occasion to court his powerful vassal; not alone, perhaps, from political motives, but because he felt within himself, without any defined cause, a kind of doubt and dislike towards

him, which he believed to be unjust, and knew to be impolitic; and which, he was continually afraid, might become apparent, unless he stretched his courtesy to its utmost extent.

D'Auvergne made no return. The frozen rigidity of his manner was never relaxed for an instant; and whatever warmth the King assumed, it could never thaw him even to a smile. Nor was this wholly the offspring of that personal dislike which he might well be supposed to feel to a happy and successful rival; but he felt that, bound by his promise to the old Duke of Istria, he had a task to perform, which Philip would consider that of an enemy, and therefore D'Auvergne resolved never to bear towards him, for a moment, the semblance of a friend.

Having, after his return to Paris, once more accepted Philip's invitation to Compiègne; which, being made upon the plea of consulting him respecting the conquest of Constantinople, was complied with, without obligation.

D'Auvergne proceeded on the evening appointed to the castle ; but, finding that Philip had not returned from the siege of Gournay, he lodged himself and his followers, as he best might, in the village. He felt, however, that he must seize the moment which presented itself, of conveying to Agnes her father's message ; and convinced, by bitter experience, of the quick and mortal nature of opportunity, the morning after his arrival he proceeded to the castle, and demanded an audience of the Queen.

No sensation on earth, perhaps, can be conceived more bitter than that of seeing the object of one's love in the possession of another ; and Thibalt d'Auvergne's heart beat painfully — his very lip grew pale, as he passed into the castle hall, and bade one of the pages announce him to the Queen. A few moments passed, after the boy's departure, in sad expectation ; the memory of former days contrasting their bright fancies with the dark and gloomy hopelessness of the present. The page

speedily returned, and informed the Count that his Lady, the Queen, would see him with pleasure if he would follow to the garden. D'Auvergne summoned all his courage; for there is more real valour in meeting and conquering our own feelings, when armed against us, than in overthrowing the best paladin that ever mounted horse. He followed the boy towards the garden with a firm step, and, on entering, soon perceived the Queen advancing to meet him.

She was no longer the gay, bright girl that he had known in Istria, on whose rosy cheek the touch of care had withered not a flower, whose step was buoyancy, whose eyes looked youth, and whose arching lip breathed the very spirit of gladness. She was no longer the same fair girl we have seen, dreaming with her beloved husband over joys and hopes that royal stations must not know — with the substantial happiness of the present, and the fanciful delights of the future, forming a beamy wreath

of smiles around her brow.—No;—she was still fair and lovely, but with a sadder kind of loveliness. The same sweet features remained, —the same bland soul, shining from within—the same heavenly eyes—the same enchanting lip: but those eyes had an expression of pensive languor, far different from former days; and that lip, though it beamed with a sweet welcoming smile, as her father's and her brother's friend approached, seemed as if chained down by some power of melancholy, so that the smile itself was sad. The rose too had left her cheek; and though a very, very lovely colour of a different hue had supplied its place, still it was not the colour of the rose. It was something more delicate, more tender, more a-kin to the last blush of the sinking sun before he stoops into the darkness.

Two of the Queen's ladies were at some distance behind, and, with good discretion, after the Count d'Auvergne had joined their royal mistress, they made that distance greater.

D'Auvergne advanced, and, as was the custom of the day, bent his lips to the Queen's hand. The one he raised it in, trembled as if it were palsied ; but there was feverish heat in that of Agnes, as he pressed his lip upon it, still more fearful.

“ Welcome to the Court, beau Sire D'Auvergne !” said the Queen with a sweet and unembarrassed smile. “ You have heard that my truant husband, Philip, has not yet returned, though he promised me, with all a lover's vows, to be back by yester-even. They tell me, you men are all false with us women, and, in good truth, I begin to think it.”

“ May you never find it too bitterly, Madam,” replied the Count.

“ Nay, you spoke that in sad earnest, my Lord,” said Agnes, now striving with effort for the same playful gaiety that was once natural to her. “ You are no longer what you were in Istria, beau Sire. But we must make you merrier before you leave our Court. Come,

you know, before the absolution, must still go confession ;” and as she spoke, with a certain sort of restlessness that had lately seized her, she led the way round the garden, adding, “ Confess, beau Sire, what makes you sad — every one must have something to make them sad — so I will be your confessor. Confess, and you shall have remission.”

She touched the Count’s wound to the quick, and he imprudently replied in a tone of sadness bordering on reproach : “ Oh ! Madam ! I fear me, confession would come too late !”

How a single word — a single tone — a single look, will sometimes give the key to a mystery. There are moments when conception, awakened we know not how, flashes like the lightning through all space, illumining at once a world that was before all darkness. That single sentence, with the tone in which it was said, touched the “ electric chain ” of memory, and ran brightening along over a thousand links in the past, which connected those words with the

days long gone by. It all flashed upon Agnes's mind at once. She had been loved—deeply, powerfully loved ; and, unknowing *then* what love was, she had not seen it. But *now*, that love was the constant food of her mind, from morning until night, her eyes were opened at once, and that, with no small pain to herself. The change in her manner, however, was instant ; and she felt, that one light word, one gay jest, after that discovery, would render her culpable, both to her husband and to Thibalt d'Auvergne. Her eye lost the light it had for a moment assumed—the smile died away upon her lip, and she became calm and cold as some fair statue.

The Count d'Auvergne saw the change, and felt perhaps why ; but as he did feel it, firm in the noble rectitude of his intentions, he lost the embarrassment of his manner, and took up the conversation which the Queen had dropped entirely.

“ To quit a most painful subject, Madam,”

he said calmly and firmly, “allow me to say that I should never have returned to Europe, had not duties called me; those duties are over, and I shall soon go back to wear out the frail rest of life amidst the soldiers of the cross. I may fall before some Saracen lance,—I may taste the cup of the mortal plague; but my bones shall whiten on a distant shore, after fighting under the sign of our salvation. There still, however, remains one task to be performed, which, however wringing to my heart, must be completed. As I returned to France, Madam, I know not what desire of giving myself pain, made me visit Istria; I there saw your noble father, who bound me by a knightly vow to bear a message to his child.”

“Indeed, Sir!” said Agnes: “let me beg you would deliver it.—But first tell me, how is my father?” she added anxiously,—“how looks he? Has age, and the wearing cares of this world, made any inroad on his vigorous strength?—Speak, Sir Count!”

“ I should say falsely, lady,” replied D’Auvrigne, “ if I said, that since I saw him before, he had not become, when last we met, an altered man. But I was told by those about him, that ‘tis within the last year this change has principally taken place.”

“ Indeed !” said Agnes thoughtfully ; “ and has it been very great ? Stoops he now ? He was as upright as a mountain pine, when I left him. Goes he forth to hunt, as formerly ?”

“ He often seeks the chase, Lady,” answered the Count, “ as a diversion to his somewhat gloomy thoughts ; but I am grieved to say, that age has bent the pine.”

Agnes mused for several minutes ; and the Count remained silent.

“ Well, Sir,” said she at length, “ the message —what is it ? Gave he no letter ?”

“ None, Madam,” said the Count ; “ he thought that a message by one who had seen him, and one whose wishes for your welfare were undoubted, might be more serviceable to the purpose he desired.”

“ My Lord, your wishes for my welfare are as undoubted by me as they are by my father,” replied the Queen, noticing a slight emphasis which D’Auvergne had placed upon the word *undoubted*; “ and therefore I am happy to receive his message from the lips of his friend.”

The Queen’s words were courteous and kind, but her manner was as cold and distant as if she had spoken to a stranger; and D’Auvergne felt hurt that it should be so, though he well knew that her conduct was perhaps the wisest for both.

After a moment’s thought, however, he proceeded to deliver the message wherewith he had been charged by the Duke of Istria and Mera-nie. “ Your father, Lady,” he said, “ charged me to give you the following message;—and let me beg you to remember, that, as far as memory serves, I use his own words; for what might be bold, presumptuous, or even unfeeling, in your brother’s poor companion in arms, becomes kind counsel and affectionate anxiety when urged by a parent. Your father, Lady,

bade me say, that he had received a letter from the common Father of the Christian Church, informing him that your marriage with the noble King Philip was not, and could not be valid, because—”

“ Spare the reasons, Sir,” said Agnes with a calm voice, indeed ; but walking on, at the same time, with that increased rapidity of pace which showed too well her internal agitation,—“spare the reasons, Sir ! I have heard them before—Indeed, too, too often !—What said my father, more ?”

“ He said, Madam, that as the Pope assured him, on his apostolic truth, that the marriage never could be rendered valid,” continued the Count ; “ and farther, that the realm of France must be put in interdict—for the interdict, Madam, had not been then pronounced ; and Celestin, a far milder judge than the present, sat in the chair of St. Peter.—He said, that as this was the case, and as the daughter of the Duke of Meranie was not formed to be an

object of discord between a king and a Christian prelate; he begged, and conjured, and commanded you to withdraw yourself from an alliance that he now considered, as disgraceful as it had formerly appeared honourable; and to return to your father's court, and the arms of your family, where, you well know, he said, that domestic love, and parental affection, would endeavour to wipe out from your heart the memory of disappointments and sorrows brought on you by no fault of your own."

" And such, indeed, was my father's command and message?" said the Queen in a tone of deep affliction.

" Such, indeed, it was, Lady," replied the Count d'Auvergne, " and he bade me, farther, entreat and conjure you, by all that is dear and sacred between parent and child, not to neglect his counsel and disobey his commands. He said moreover that he knew—" and Thibalt d'Auvergne's lip quivered as if the agony of death was struggling in his heart—" he said

that he knew how fondly you loved the noble King your husband, and how hard it would be to tear yourself from him. But he begged you to remember that your house's honour was at stake, and not to shrink from your duty."

"Sir Count," said Agnes, in a voice that faltered with emotion, "he, nor no one else, *can* tell how I love my husband — how deeply — how fondly — how devotedly. Yet that should not stay me; for though I would as soon tear out my heart, and trample it under my own feet, as quit him; yet I would do it, if my honour and my duty bade me go. But my honour and my duty bid me stay—" She paused, and thoughtfully followed the direction of the walk, clasping her small hands together, and bending down her eyes, as one whose mind, unaccustomed to decide between contending arguments, is bewildered by number and reiteration, but not convinced. She thus advanced some way in the turn towards the castle,

and then added — “ Besides, even if I would, how could I quit my husband’s house and territories ? How could I return to Istria without his will ? ”

“ That difficulty, Madam, I would smooth for you or die,” replied the Count. “ The troops of Auvergne could and should protect you.”

“ The troops of Auvergne against Philip of France ! ” exclaimed Agnes, raising her voice, while her eye flashed with an unwonted fire, and her lip curled with a touch of scorn. “ And doubtless the Count d’Auvergne to head them, and defend the truant wife against her angry husband ! ”

“ You do me wrong, Lady,” replied D’Auvergne calmly — “ you do me wrong. The Count d’Auvergne is boon for other lands. Nor would he do one act for worlds, that could, even in the ill-judging eyes of men, cast a shade over the fame and honour of one — ” He paused, and broke off his sentence, adding —

“ But no more of that — Lady, you do me wrong. I did but deem, that, accompanied by your own holy confessor, and what other prelates or clergymen you would, a thousand of my armed vassals might convey you safely to the court of your father ; while I, bound by a holy vow, should take shipping at Marseilles, and never set my foot on shore till I might plant it on the burning sands of Palestine. — Lady, may this be ?”

“ No, Lord Count, no !” — replied Agnes, her indignation at any one dreaming of opposing the god of her idolatry, still unsubdued ; “ it cannot, nor it must not be ! Did I seek Istria at all, I would rather don a pilgrim’s weeds, and beg my way thither on foot. But I seek it not, my Lord—I never will seek it. Philip is my husband — France is my land. The bishops of this realm have freed, by their united decree, their King from all other engagement than that to me ; and so long as he himself shall look upon that engagement as

valid, I will not doubt its firmness and its truth."

" I have then discharged me of my unpleasant duty, Lady," said the Count d'Auvergne. " My task is accomplished, and my promise to your father fulfilled. Yet, that it may be well fulfilled, let me beg you once again to think of your father's commands; and knowing the nobleness of his nature, the clearness of his judgment, and the fearless integrity of his heart, think if he would have urged you to quit King Philip without he thought it your duty to do so."

" He judged as a father; I judge as a wife," replied Agnes. " I love my father—I would die for him; and, but to see him, I would sacrifice crown, and dignity, and wealth. Yet, once for all, beau Sire d'Auvergne, urge me no more; for, notwithstanding all you can say—notwithstanding my own feelings in this respect, I must not—I cannot—I will not quit my husband. That name alone, *my husband*, were enough to

bind me to him by every duty, and I will never quit him."

D'Auvergne was silent; for he saw, by the flushed cheek and disturbed look of Agnes de Meranie, that he had urged her as far as in honour and courtesy he dared to go. They had by this time turned towards the château, from which they beheld a page, habited in green, advancing rapidly towards them.

"Some one is coming, Count d'Auvergne," said Agnes hastily, fearful, although her women were at a little distance behind, that any stranger should see her discomposed look.—"Some one is coming.—Begone! Leave me!" And seeing the Count about to speak again, though it was but to take his leave, she added—"Never let me hear of this again! Begone, Sir, I beg!"

She then stooped down to trifle with some flowers, till such time as the stranger should be gone, or her own cheek lose the heated flush with which it was overspread.

In the mean while, the Count d'Auvergne bowed low, and turned towards the castle. Before he had reached it, however, he was encountered by De Coucy's page, who put a paper in his hand, one glance of which made him hasten forward; and passing directly through the hall of the château, he issued out at the other gate. From thence he proceeded to the lodging where he had passed the night before—called his retainers suddenly together, mounted his horse, and rode away.

As soon as he left her, Agnes de Meranie raised her head from the flowers over which she had been stooping, and walked on slowly, musing, towards the castle; while thought—that strange phantasmagoria of the brain—presented to her a thousand vague and incoherent forms, called up by the conversation that had just passed—plans, and fears, and hopes, and doubts, crowding the undefined future; and memories, regrets, and sorrows, thronging equally the past. Fancy, the quick wanderer,

had travelled far in a single moment, when the sound of a hasty step caught her ear, passing along under the trellis of vines that skirted the garden wall. She could not see the figure of the person that went by; but it needed not that she should. The sound of that footfall was as well known to her ear as the most familiar form to her eye; and, bending her head, she listened again, to be sure — very sure.

“ ‘Tis Philip !” said she, all her other feelings forgotten, and hope and joy sparkling again in her eye — “ ‘tis Philip ! He sees me not, and yet he knows that at this hour it is my wont to walk here. But perhaps ‘tis later than I thought. He is in haste too by his step. However, I will in, with all speed, to meet him ;” and signing to her women to come up, she hastened towards the castle.

“ Have you seen the King ?” demanded she of a page, who hurried to open the gates for her.

“ He has just passed, Madam,” replied the youth. “ He seemed to go into the great hall

in haste, and is now speaking to the sergeants-at-arms. You may hear his voice."

"I do," said the Queen; and proceeding to her apartments, she waited for her husband's coming, with all that joyful hope that seemed destined in this world as meet prey for disappointment.

CHAPTER IX.

AT Tours, we have seen De Coucy despatch his page towards the Count d'Auvergne ; and at Compiègne we have seen the same youth deliver a letter to that nobleman. But we must here pause, to trace more particularly the course of the messenger, which, in truth, was not near so direct as at first may be imagined.

There was, at the period referred to, a little hostelry in the town of Château du Loir, which was neat and well-furnished enough for the time it flourished in.* It had the most com-

* I know not precisely how far back a curious antiquary might trace the existence of such places of public reception. I find one mentioned, however, in the Chronicle of Vezelai, about fifty years prior to the period of which I write.

fortable large hearth in the world, which, in those days, was the next great excellence in a house of general reception, to that of having good wine, which always held the first place ; and round this—on each side of the fire, as well as behind it—was a large stone seat, that might accommodate well fifteen or sixteen persons on a cold evening. At the far corner of this hearth, one night in the wane of September, when days are hot and evenings are chilly, sat a fair youth of about eighteen years of age, for whom the good hostess, an honest, ancient dame, that always prayed God's blessing on a pair of rosy cheeks, was mulling some spiced wine, to cheer him after a long and heavy day's riding.

“ Ah, now ! I warrant thee,” said the good lady, adjusting the wood embers carefully round the little pipkin, on the top of which just began to appear a slight creaming foam, promising a speedy conclusion to her labours —“ ay, now ! I warrant thee, thou hast seen them all—

—the fair Lady Isadore, and pretty Mistress Alice the head maid, and little Eleonor with her blue eyes.—Ha, Sir Page, you redder ! I have touched thee, child. God bless thee, boy ! never blush to be in love. Your betters have been so before thee ; and I warrant little Eleonor would blush too. God bless her, and St. Luke the apostate ! Oh, bless thee, my boy, I know them all ! God wot they stayed here, master and man, two days, while they were waiting for news from the King John ; and old Sir Julian himself vowed he was as well here as in the best castle of France or England.”

“ Well, well, Dame ! I have ridden hard back, at all events,” replied the Page ; “ and I will make my horse’s speed soon catch up, between this and Paris, the day and a half I have lingered here ; so that my noble Lord cannot blame me for loitering on his errand.”

“ Tut, tut ! He will never know a word,” cried the old dame, applying to the page that sort of consolatory assurance that our faults will

rest unknown, which has damned many a one, both man and woman, in this world — “ he will never know a word of it ; and, if he did, he would forgive it. Lord, Lord ! being a knight, of course he is in love himself ; and knows what love is. God bless him ! and all true knights ! I say.”

“ Oh, in love — to be sure he is !” replied the Page. “ Bless thee, Dame ! when we came all hot from the Holy Land, like loaves out of an oven, my Lord no sooner clapped his eyes upon the Lady Isadore, than he was in love up to the ears, as they say. Ay ! and would ride as far to see her, as I would to see little Eleonor. — But tell me, Dame, have you staked the door as I asked you ?”

“ Latch down, and bolt shot !” answered the old lady ; “ but what shouldst thou fear, poor child ? Thou art not of King John’s friends ; that I well divine ; but, bless thee ! every one who has passed, this blessed day, says they are moving the other way ; though, in good troth,

I have no need to say God be thanked ; for the heavy Normans, and the thirsty English, would sit here and drink me pot after pot, and it mattered not what wine I gave them—Loiret was as good as Beaugency. God bless them all, and St. Luke the Apostate ! as I said. So what need'st thou fear, boy ?”

“ Why, I'll tell thee, good Dame. If they caught me, and knew I was the De Coucy's man, they would hang me up, for God's benison,” said the Page ; “ and I narrowly escaped on the road too. Five mounted men, with their arms covered with soldiers' mantles,—though they looked like knights, and rode like knights too,—chased me for more than a mile. They had a good score of archers at their backs ; and I would have dodged them across the country, but every little hill I came to, I saw a body of horse on all sides, moving pace by pace with them. Full five hundred men, I counted, one way and another ; and there might be five hundred more, for aught I know.”

“ Now, St. Barbara’s toe nail to St. Luke’s shoulder bone,” exclaimed the hostess, mingling somewhat strangely the relics which she was accustomed to venerate, with the profane wagers of the soldiery who frequented her house—“ now, St. Barbara’s toe nail to St. Luke’s shoulder bone, that these are the men whom my lodger up-stairs expected to come to-night !”

“ What lodger ?” cried the Page anxiously. “ Dame, Dame, you told me, this very morning, you had none !”

“ And I told you true, Sir Chit !” replied the old woman, bridling at the tone of reproach the Page adopted. “ I told you true.—There, drink your wine — it is well mulled now ;— take care you do not split the horn, pouring it in so hot. — I told you true enough—I had no lodger this morning, when you went ; but, half an hour after, came one who had ridden all night, with a great *boutiau* at his saddle, that would hold four quarts. Cursed be those *boutiaus* !

they cut us vintners' combs. Every man carries his wine with him, and never sets foot in a hostelry but to feed his horse."

"But the traveller!—the traveller!—Good Dame, tell me," cried the Page, "what manner of man was he?"

"A goodly man, i'faith," replied the landlady. "Taller than thou art, Sir Page, by a hand's breadth. He had been in a fray, I warrant, for his eye was covered over with a patch, and his nose broken across. He too would fain not be seen, and made me put him in a guest-chamber at the end of the dormitory. He calls himself Alberic, though that is nothing to me or any one: and there was a Norman came to speak with him an hour after he came; but that is nothing to me either."

"Hark, Dame! hark! I hear horses," cried the Page, starting up in no small trepidation. "Where can I hide me? Where?" and, even as he asked the question, he began to climb the stairs, that came almost perpendicularly down

into the centre of the room, with all the precipitation of fear.

“ Not there! — not there!” cried the old woman; “ thou wilt meet that Alberic. Into that cupboard;” and, seizing the Page by the arm, she pushed him into a closet filled with fagots and brushwood for replenishing the kitchen fire. Under this heap he ensconced himself as well as he might, paying no regard to the skin of his hands and face, which was very sufficiently scratched in the operation of diving down to the bottom of the pile. The old lady, who seemed quite familiar with all such manœuvres, while the sound of approaching horses came nearer and nearer, arranged what he had disarranged in his haste, sat down by the fire, tossed off the remainder of the wine in the pipkin, and began to spin quietly, while the horses’ feet that had startled the Page clattered on through the village. In a moment after, they stopped at the door; and, at the same time, a heavy footfall was heard pacing forward above,

as if some one, disturbed also by the sounds, approached to listen at the head of the stairs.

“ Ho ! Within there !” cried some person without, after having pushed the door, and found it bolted.—“ Ho ! Within there ! Open, I say.”

The old dame ran forward, taking care to make her feet give audible sounds of haste upon the floor ; and, instantly unfastening the door, she stood becking and bowing to the strangers, as they dismounted from their horses and entered the kitchen.

“ God save ye, fair Sir !—God save ye, noble gentlemen. Welcome, welcome!—Lord ! Lord ! I have not seen such a sight of noble faces since good King John’s army went ! The blessing of God be upon him and them ! He is a right well favoured and kingly Lord ! Bless his noble eyes, and his sweet low forehead, and send him plenty of crowns to put upon it !”

“ How, Dame ! Dost thou know King

John?" asked one of the strangers, laying his hand upon the hostess's shoulders, with an air of kindly familiarity. "But thou mistakest. I have heard he is villainous ugly. Ha!"

"Lord forgive you, Sire, and St. Luke the apostate!" cried the old woman. "He is the sweetest gentleman you ever set your eyes on. Many a time have I seen him, when the army was here; and so handsome he is! Lord, Lord!"

"Ha! methinks thou wouldest look handsomer thus, thyself," cried the stranger, suddenly snatching off the old woman's quoif, and setting it down again on her head with the wrong side in front. "So, my lovely lass!" and he patted the high cap with the whole strength of his hand, so as to flatten it completely. "So, so!"

His four companions burst into a loud and applauding laugh, and were proceeding to follow up his jest upon the old woman, when the other stopped them at once, crying, "Enough, my masters! no more of it. Let us to business. Guil-

laume de la Roche Guyon, you shall make love to the old wench another time.—Now, beautiful lady !” he continued, mocking the chivalrous speeches of the day. “ Would those sweet lips but deign to open the coral boundary of sound, and inform an unhappy Knight, who has this evening ridden five long leagues, whether one Sir Alberic, as he is pleased to call himself, lodges in your castle ?”

“ Lord bless your noble and merry heart !” replied the old woman, apparently not at all offended or discomposed by the accustomed gibes of her guests. “ How should I know Sir Alberic ? I never ask strangers’ names that do my poor hostel the honour of putting up at it. Not but that I may have heard the name, and lately ; but—”

“ But hold thy peace, old woman !” said a voice from above. “ These persons want me, and I want them ;” and down the staircase came no less a person than our friend Jodelle, the captain of De Coucy’s troop of Brabançois.

One eye indeed was covered with a patch ; but this addition to his countenance was probably assumed less as a concealment, than for the purpose of covering the marks of a tremendous blow which we may remember the Knight had dealt him with the pommel of his sword ; and which, notwithstanding the patch, shone out in a large livid swelling all round.

“ Tell me, Dame,” cried he, advancing to the hostess, before he exchanged one word of salutation with the strangers. “ Who was it that stopped at your gate half an hour ago on horseback, and where is he gone ? He was speaking with thee but now, for I heard two voices.”

“ Lord bless you, Sir, and St. Luke the apostate, to boot !” said the old woman, “ ‘twas but my nephew, poor boy ; frightened out of his life, because he said he had met with some of King Philip’s horsemen on the road. So he slipped away when he heard horses coming, and took his beast round to the field to ride off without being noticed, because being of the

English party, King Philip would hang him if he caught him."

" King Philip's horsemen!" cried the first stranger, turning deadly pale. " Whence did he come, good Dame? What road did he travel, that he saw King Philip's horsemen?"

" He came from Flêche, fair Sir," replied the hostess, " and he said there were five of them chased him; and he saw many more scattered about."

" Oh, nonsense!" cried one of the other strangers. "'Tis the youth we chased ourselves. He has taken us for Philip's men.—How was he dressed, Dame?"

" In green, beau Sire," replied the ready hostess. " He had a green cassock on, I am well nigh sure."

" 'Tis the same!—'tis the same!" said the stranger, who had asked the last question.—" Be not afraid, beau Sire," he added, speaking in a low tone to the stranger who had entered first. " Philip is far enough; and were he

near, he should dine off the heads of lances, and quaff red blood, till he were drunk, ere he harmed a hair of your head. So, be not afraid."

"Afraid, Sir!" replied the other, drawing himself up haughtily, now re-assured by the certainty of the mistake concerning Philip's horsemen. "How came you to suppose I am afraid?—Now, good fellow," he continued, turning to Jodelle, "are you that Alberic that wrote a billet this morning to the camp at——?"

"By your leave, fair Sir," interrupted Jodelle, "we will have a clear coast.—Come, old woman, get thee out! We must be alone."

"What! out of my own kitchen, Sir?" cried the hostess. "That is hard allowance, surely."

"It must needs be so, however," answered Jodelle: "out at that door, good Dame! Thou shalt not be long on the other side;" and, very unceremoniously taking the landlady by the arm, he put her out at the door which opened

on the street, and bolted it once more. “ And now,” said he, “ to see that no lurkers are about.”

So saying, he examined the different parts of the room, and then opened the door of the closet, in which the poor Page lay trembling like an aspen leaf.

“ Brushwood !” said Jodelle, taking a candle from one of the iron brackets that lighted the room, and advancing into the closet, he laid his hand on one of the bundles, and rolled it over.

The Page, cringing into the space of a pygmy, escaped his sight, however ; and the roll of the fagot, instead of discovering him, concealed him still better by falling down upon his head. But still unsatisfied, the marauder drew his sword, and plunged it into the mass of brushwood to make all sure.—There was in favour of the poor Page’s life but the single chance of Jodelle’s blade passing to the right or left of him. Still, that chance was for him. The Brabançois’

sword was aimed a little on one side, and, leaving him uninjured, struck against the wall. Jodelle sheathed it again, satisfied, and returned to the strangers, the chief of whom had seated himself by the fire, and was, with strange levity, moralizing on the empty pipkin which had held the mulled wine.

His voice was sweet and melodious, and, though he evidently spoke in mockery, one might discover in his speech those tones and accents that lead and persuade.

“Mark! Guillaume de la Roche,” said he, “Mark! Pembroke, and you, Sir Alberic, mark well! for it may happen in your sinful life, that never again shall you hear how eloquently a pipkin speaks to man. Look at it, as I hold it now in my hand. No man amongst you would buy it at half a denier; but fill it with glorious wine of Montrichard, and it is worth ten times the sum. Man! man! thou art but a pipkin, — formed of clay — baked in youth — used in manhood — broken in age. So long as thou art

filled with spirit, thou art valuable and ennobled ; but the moment the spirit is out, thou art but a lump of clay again. While thou art full, men never abandon thee ; but when thou art sucked empty, they give thee up, and let thee drop as I do the pipkin ;" and opening his finger and thumb, he suffered it to fall on the floor, where it at once dashed itself to pieces.

" And now, Sir Alberic," continued he, turning to Jodelle, " what the devil do you want with me ?"

" Beau Sire, King," said Jodelle, bending his knee before the stranger, " if you are indeed, as your words imply, John, King of England—"

" I am but a pipkin !" interrupted the light King. " Alas ! Sir Alberic, I am but a pipkin. —But proceed, proceed.—I am the King."

" Well then, my Lord," answered Jodelle, in truth, somewhat impatient in his heart at the King's mockery, " as I was bold to tell you in my letter, I have heard that your heart's best desire is to have under your safe care

and guidance your nephew, Arthur, Duke of Brittany—”

“ Thou speakest right, fellow !” cried the King John, wakening to animation at the thought. “ ’Tis my heart’s dearest wish to have him.—Where is the little rebel ? Produce him ! Have you got him here ?”

“ Good God ! my Lord, you forget !” said the Earl of Pembroke. “ This fair gentleman cannot be expected to carry your nephew about with him, like a holy relic in a reliquary.”

“ Or, a white mouse in a show-box,” added Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, laughing.

“ Good, good !” cried John, joining in the laugh.—“ But come, Sir Alberic, speak plainly. Where is the white mouse ? When wilt thou open thy show-box ? We have come ourselves, because thou wouldest deal with none but us ; therefore, now thou hast our presence, bear thyself discreetly in it.—Come, when wilt thou open the box, I pray ?”

“ When it pleases you to pay the poor show-

man his price?" said Jodelle, bowing low and standing calmly before the King, in the attitude of one who knows, that, for the moment at least, he commands, where he seems to be commanded; and that his demands, however exorbitant, must be complied with.

" Ha!" said John, knitting his brows; " I had forgot that there is not one man on all the earth who has not his price.—Pray, what is thine, fellow?"

" I am very moderate, beau Sire," replied Jodelle, with the most imperturbable composure, " very moderate in regard to what I sell.—Would you know, my Lord King, what I demand for placing your nephew Arthur in your hands, with all those who are now assisting him to besiege the Queen, your mother, in her château of Mirebeau?—'Tis a worthy deed, and merits some small recompense."

" Speak, speak, man!" cried the King impatiently. " Go not round and round the matter. Speak it out plainly. What sum dost thou ask?"

“ Marry ! my Lord, there must go more than sums to the bargain,” replied Jodelle boldly. “ But if you would know justly what I do demand, 'tis this. First, you shall pay me down, or give me here an order on your royal treasure for the sum of ten thousand marks in what coin you will.”

“ By the Lord, and the Holy Evangelists !” cried the King ; but, then pausing, he added, while he turned a half smiling glance to Lord Pembroke :—“ Well, thou shalt have the order on the royal treasury. What next ?”

“ After you have given me the order, Sire,” replied Jodelle, answering the meaning of the King’s smile, “ I will find means to wring the money out of your friends, or out of your enemies, even should your treasure be as dry as hay.”

“ Try my enemies first, good Alberic,” said the King ; “ my friends have enough to do already.—But what next ? for you put that firstly, if I forget not.”

“ Next, you must give me commission, under your royal signet, to raise for your use, and at your expense, one thousand free lances,” replied Jodelle stoutly, “ engaged to serve you for the space of ten years. Moreover, I must have annually half the pay of Mercader ; and you must consent to dub me Knight with your royal hand.”

“ Knight !” cried the Earl of Pembroke, turning fiercely upon him.—“ By the Lord ! if the King do dub so mean and pitiful a traitor, I will either make the day of your dubbing the last of your life ; or I will have my own sculion strike off my own spurs, as a dishonour to my heels, when such a villain wears the same.”

“ When those spurs *are* on, Lord Pembroke,” replied Jodelle boldly, “ thou shalt not want one to meet thee, and give thee back scorn for scorn. Till then, meddle with what concerns thee, and mar not the King’s success with thy scolding.”

“ Peace, Pembroke ! peace !” cried King John, seeing his hasty Peer about to make angry answer. “ Who dare interfere, where my will speaks?—And now tell me, fellow Alberic,” he added with an air of dignity he could sometimes assume. “ Suppose that we refuse thine exacting demands—what follows then?”

“ Why, that I betake myself to my beast’s back, and ride away as I came,” answered Jodelle undisturbedly.

“ But suppose we do not let thee go,” continued the King; “ and farther, suppose we hang thee up to the elm before the door.”

“ Then you will have broken a King’s honour, to win a dead carcase,” answered the Brabançois. “ For nothing shall you ever know from me, that may stead you in your purpose.”

“ But we have tortures, Sir, would almost make the dead speak,” rejoined King John. “ Such, at least, as would make thee wish thyself dead a thousand times, ere death came to thy relief.”

“I doubt thee not, Sir King,” answered Jodelle, with the same determined tone and manner in which he had heretofore spoken—“I doubt thee not; and, as I pretend to no more love for tortures than my neighbours, 'tis more than likely I should tell thee all I could tell, before the thumbscrew had taken half a turn; but it would avail thee nothing, for nought that I could tell thee would make my men withdraw till they have me amongst them; and, until they be withdrawn, you may as well try to surprise the sun of heaven, guarded by all his rays, as catch Prince Arthur and Guy de Coucy.”

“Why wouldest thou not come to the camp, then?” demanded John. “If thou wert so secure, why camest thou not when I sent for thee?”

“Because, King John, I once served your brother Richard,” replied the Brabançois, “and during that time I made me so many dear friends in Mercader's band, that I thought,

if I came to visit them, without two or three hundred men at my back, they might, out of pure love, give me a banquet of cold steel, and lodging with our lady mother,—the earth."

"The fellow jests, Lords! On my soul! the fellow jests!" cried John.—"Get thee back, sirrah, a step or two; and let me consult with my nobles," he added.—"Look to him, Pembroke, that he escape not."

John then spoke for several minutes with the gentlemen who had attended him to this extraordinary meeting; and the conversation, though carried on in a low tone, seemed in no slight degree animated; more especially on the part of Lord Pembroke, who frequently spoke loud enough for such words to be heard as "disgrace to chivalry—disgust the Barons of England—would not submit to have their order degraded," &c.

At length, however, a moment of greater calm succeeded; and John, beckoning the Coterel forward, spoke to him thus:—

“ Our determination is taken, good fellow, and thou shalt subscribe to it, or not, as thou wilt. First, we will give thee the order upon our treasury for the ten thousand marks of silver; always provided, that, within ten days’ time, the body of Arthur Plantagenet is by thy means placed in our hands—living—or dead,” added the King, with a fearful emphasis on the last word. At the same time he contracted his brows, and though his eyes still remained fixed upon Jodelle, he half-closed the eyelids over them, as if he considered his own countenance as a mask through which his soul could gaze out without being seen, while he insinuated what he was afraid or ashamed to proclaim openly.

Lord Pembroke gave a meaning glance to another nobleman who stood behind the King; and who slightly raised his shoulder and drew down the corner of his mouth as a reply, while the King proceeded :—

“ We will grant thee also, on the same con-

dition, that which thou demandest in regard to raising a band of Brabançois, and serving as their commander, together with all the matter of pay, and whatever else you have mentioned on that head ; but as to creating thee a knight, 'tis what we will not, nor cannot do ; at least, for service of this kind. If you like the terms, well !” concluded the King ; “ if not, there stands an elm at the door, as we have before said, which would form as cool and shady a dangling place, as a man could wish to hang on in a September’s day.”

“ Nay, I have no wish of the kind,” replied the Brabançois : “ if I must hang on any thing, let it be a king, not a stump of timber. I will not drive my bargain hard, Sir King. Sign me the papers now, with all the conditions you mention ; and when I am your servant, I will do you such good service, that yon proud Lord, who now stands in the way of my knighthood, shall own I deserve it as well as himself.”

The Earl of Pembroke gave him a glance of

scorn, but replied not to his boast ; and writing materials having been procured from some of the attendants without—the whole house being by this time surrounded with armed men, who had been commanded to follow the King by different roads — the papers were drawn up, and signed by the King.

“ And now, my Lord,” said Jodelle, with the boldness of a man who can render needful service, “ look upon Prince Arthur as your own. Advance with all speed upon Mirebeau. When you are within five leagues, halt till night. Arthur, with the hogs of Poitou, is kinging it in the town.—De Coucy sleeps by his watch-fire under the castle mound.—My men keep the watch on this side of the town. Let your troops advance quietly in the dark, giving the word *Jodelle*, and without sign or signal, my free fellows shall retire before you, till you are in the very heart of the place. Arthur, with his best knights, sleeps at the *Prévôt*’s house ; surround that, and you have them all, without drawing a sword.—Love you the plan ?”

“By my crown and honour!” cried the King, his eyes sparkling with delight, “if the plan be as well executed as it is devised, thou wilt merit a diamond worth a thousand marks, to weigh your silver down. Count upon me, good Alberic! as your best friend through life, if thy plot succeeds. Count on me, Alberic—”

“Jodelle! for the future, so please you, Sire,” replied the Coterel; “Alberic was but assumed:—and now, my Lord, I will to horse and away; for I must put twenty long leagues between me and this place before the dawn of to-morrow.”

“Speed you well!—speed you well, good Jodelle!” replied the King, rising: “I will away too, to move forward on Mirebeau, like an eagle to his prey.—Come, Lords! to horse!—Count on me, good Jodelle!” he repeated, as he put his foot in the stirrup, and turned away, “count on me—to hang you as high as the crow builds,” he muttered to himself as he galloped off—“ay, count on me for that!—Well; Lords, what think you of our night’s

work?—By heaven! our enemies are in our hands! We have but to do, as I have seen a child catch flies,—sweep the board with our palm, and we grasp them all."

"True, my Lord," replied the Earl of Pembroke, who had been speaking in a low voice with some of the other followers of the Prince. "But there are several things to be considered first."

"How to be considered, Sir?" demanded King John, somewhat checking his horse's pace with an impatient start. "What is it now?—for I know by that word, *considered*, that there is some rebellion to my will, toward."

"Not so, Sire," replied the Earl of Pembroke firmly; "but the Barons of England, my Liege, have to remember, that by direct line of descent, Arthur Plantagenet was the clear heir to Richard Cœur de Lion. Now, though there wants not reason or example, to show that we have a right to choose from the royal family which member we think most fit to bear the

sceptre ; yet we so far respect the blood of our kings, and so far feel for the generous ardour of a noble youth who seeks but to regain a kingdom which he deems his of right, that we will not march against Arthur Plantagenet, without you, Sire, will promise to moderate your wrath towards him, to confirm him in his dukedom of Brittany, and to refrain from placing either your nephew, or any of his followers, in any strong place or prison, on pretext of guarding them."

John was silent for a long space, for his habitual dissimulation could hardly master the rage that struggled in his bosom. It conquered at last, however, and its triumph was complete.

"I will own, I am grieved, Lord Pembroke," said he, in a hurt and sorrowful tone, "to think that my good English Barons should so far doubt their King as to approach the very verge of rebellion and disobedience, to obtain what he could never have a thought of denying. The

promises you require I give you, as freely and as willingly as you could ask them ; and if I fail to keep them in word and deed, let my orders be no longer obeyed ; let my sceptre be broken, my crown torn from my head, and let me, by peer and peasant, be no longer regarded as a King."

" Thanks ! my Lord ! thanks !" cried Lord Bagot and one or two of the other Barons, who followed. " You are a free and noble Sovereign, and a right loyal and excellent King. We thank you well for your free promise and accord."

Lord Pembroke was silent. He knew John profoundly, and he had never seen promises steadily kept, which had been so easily obtained.

CHAPTER X.

“ Now, good Dame, the reckoning,” cried Jodelle, as soon as King John was gone.

“ Good Dame not me!” cried the hostess, forgetting, in her indignation at having been put out of her own kitchen, and kept for half an hour in the street amidst soldiers and horseboys, all her habitual and universal civility.— It might be shown by a learned dissertation, that there are particular points of pride in every human heart, of so inflammable a nature, that though we may bear insult and injury, attack and affront upon every other subject, with the most forbearing consideration of our self interest, yet but touch one of those points

with the very tip of the brand of scorn, and the whole place is in a blaze in a moment, at the risk of burning the house down. But time is wanting; therefore, suffice it to say, that the landlady, who could bear, and had in her day borne all that woman can bear, was so indignant at being put from her own door—that stronghold of an inn-keeper's heart, where he sees thousands arrive and depart without stirring a foot himself—that she vituperated the worthy Brabançois thereupon, somewhat more than his patience would endure.

“ Come, come, old woman !” cried he, an’ thou will not name thy reckoning, no reckoning shalt thou have. I am not one of those who often pay either for man’s food or horse pro-vender, so I shall take my beast from the stall and set out.”

“ Nay, nay !” she said, more fearful of Jodelle discovering the Page’s horse still in the stable, than even of losing her reckoning—“ nay ! it should not be said that any one,

however uncivil, was obliged to fetch his own horse. She had a boy for her stable, God wot ! — Ho ! boy !” she continued, screaming from the door, “ bring up the bay horse for the gentleman. Quick !—As to the reckoning, Sir, it comes only to a matter of six sous.”

The reckoning was paid, and before Jodelle could reach the stable to which he was proceeding, notwithstanding the landlady’s remonstrance, his horse was brought up, whereupon he mounted and set off at full speed.

The moment the clatter of his horse’s feet had passed away, the pile of fagots and brushwood rolled into the middle of the floor, and the half-suffocated Page sprang out of his place of concealment. His face and hands were scratched and torn, and his dress was soiled to that degree, that the old lady could not refrain from laughing, till she saw the deadly paleness of his countenance.

“ Get me a stoup of wine, good Dame — get me a stoup of wine—I am faint and sad — get

me some wine!" cried the youth. " Alack! that I, and no other, should have heard what I have heard!"

The old lady turned away to obey, and the Page, casting himself on a settle before the fire, pressed his clasped hands between his knees, and sat gazing on the embers, with a bewildered and horrified stare, in which both fear and uncertainty had no small part.

" Good God! what shall I do?" cried he at length. " If I go back to Sir Guy, and tell him that, though he ordered me to make all speed to the Count d'Auvergne, I turned out of my way to see Eleonor, because the pedlar told me she was at La Flêche, he will surely cleave my skull with his battle-axe for neglecting the duty on which he sent me." And an aguish trembling seized the poor youth, as he thought of presenting himself to so dreadful a fate.

" And if I go not," added he thoughtfully, " what will be the consequence? The triumph

of a traitor — the destruction of my brave and noble master — the ruin of the Prince's enterprise. — I will go — Let him do his worst — I will go. Little Eleonor can but lose her lover ; and doubtless she will soon get another — and she will forget me, and be happy, I dare say ;" and the tears filled his eyes, between emotion at the heroism of his own resolution, and the painful images his fancy called up, while thinking of her he loved. " But I will go," he continued — " I will go. He may kill me if he will ; but I will save his life, at least. — Come, good Dame ! give me the wine !"

The poor Page set the flagon to his lips, believing, like many another man, that if truth lies in a well, courage and resolution make their abode in a tankard. In the present instance, he found it marvellous true ; and within a few minutes his determination was so greatly fortified, that he repeated the experiment, and soon drank himself into a hero.

" Now, good Dame ! — now, I will go !"

cried he. “ Bid thy boy bring me my horse. And thank God, all your days, for putting me in that closet ; for, owing to that, one of the most diabolical schemes shall be thwarted that ever the devil himself helped to fabricate.”

“ The Lord be praised ! and St. Luke and St. Martin the apostates !” cried the hostess ; “ and their blessing be upon your handsome face !—Your reckoning comes to nine sous, beau Sire, which is cheap enough in all conscience. seeing I have nourished you as if you were my own son, and hid you in the cupboard as if you were my own brother.

The Page did not examine very strictly the landlady’s accounts ; though be it remarked, nine sous was in that day no inconsiderable sum ; but, having partaken freely of the thousand marks which De Coucy had received before leaving Paris, he dispensed his money with the boyish liberality that too often leaves us with our very early years.

“ Allons !” cried he, springing on his horse,

“ I will go, let what may come of it. Which way do I turn, Dame, to reach Mirebeau ?”

“ To the left, beau Page,—to the left !” replied the old woman. “ But Lord-a-mercy on thy sweet heart ! 'tis a far way.—Take the second road, that branches to the right, Sir Page,” she screamed after him ; “ and then, where it separates again, keep to the left.” But long ere she had concluded her directions, the youth was far out of hearing.

He rode on, and he rode on ; and when the morning dawned, he found himself with a weary horse, and a sad heart, still in the sweet plains of bright Touraine. The world looked all gay and happy, in the early light. There was a voice of rejoicing in the air, and a smile in the whole prospect, which went not well in harmony with the feelings of the poor youth's heart. Absorbed in his own griefs, and little knowing the universality of care, as he looked upon the merry sunshine streaming over the slopes and woods which laughed and sparkled in

the rays, he fancied himself the only sorrowful thing in nature ; and, when he heard the clear-voiced lark rise upon her quivering wings, and fill the sky with her carolling, he dropped his bridle upon his horse's neck, and clasped his hand over his eyes. He was going, he thought, to give himself up to death ;—to quit the sunshine, and the light, and the hopes of youth, and the enjoyments of fresh existence, for the cold charnel,—the dark, heavy grave,—the still, rigid, feelingless torpor of the dead !

Did his resolution waver ? Did he ever dream of letting fate have its course with his lord and his enterprise, and, imitating the lark, to wing his flight afar, and leave care behind him ? He did ! He did, indeed, more than once ; and the temptation was the stronger, as his secret would ever rest with himself—as neither punishment nor dishonour could ever follow, and as the upbraiding voice of conscience was all that he had to fear. The better spirit, however, of the chivalrous age came to his aid—

that generous principle of self-devotion — that constantly inculcated contempt of life where opposed to honour, which raised the ancient knight to a pitch of glory, that the most calculating wisdom could never obtain, had its effect even in the bosom of the Page; and, though never doubting that death would be the punishment of his want of obedience and discipline, he still went on to save his master and accuse himself.

It was not long, however, before the means presented itself, as he thought, of both sparing the confession, and circumventing the villainous designs of the Brabançois. As he rode slowly into a little village, about eight o'clock in the morning, he saw a horse tied to the lintel of a door, by the way-side, which he instantly recognised as Jodelle's, and he thanked St. Martin of Tours, as if this rencontre was a chance peculiarly of that Saint's contriving. The plan of the Page smacked strongly of the thirteenth century. "Here is the villain," said he, "refreshing at that house after his night's ride.

Now, may the blessed St. Martin never be good to me again, if I do not attack him the moment he comes forth ; and, though he be a strong man, and twice as old as I am, I have encountered many a Saracen in the Holy Land, and, with God's blessing, I will kill the traitor, and so stop him in his enterprise. Then may I ride on merrily, to seek the Count d'Auvergne, and never mention a word of this plot of theirs, or of my own playing truant either."

Ermold de Marcy—for so was the Page called—had a stout heart in all matters of simple battle, as ever entered a listed field ; and had Jodelle been ten times as renowned a person as he was, Ermold would have attacked him without fear, though his whole heart sunk at the bare idea of offering himself to De Coucy's battle-axe ; so different is the prospect of contention, in which death may ensue, from the prospect of death itself.

Quietly moderating his horse's progress to the slowest possible pace, lest the noise of his

hoofs should call Jodelle's attention, he advanced to the same cottage ; and, not to take his adversary at an unjust disadvantage, he dismounted, and tied his beast to a post hard by. He then brought round his sword ready to his hand, loosened his dagger in the sheath, and went on towards the door ; but, at that moment, the loud neighing of the Brabangois' courser, excited by the proximity of his fellow quadruped, called Jodelle himself to the door.

The instant he appeared, Ermold, without more ado, rushed upon him, and, striking him with his clenched fist, exclaimed, " You are a villain !" Then springing back into the middle of the road, to give his antagonist free space, he drew his sword with one hand, and his dagger with the other, and waited his approach.

For his part, Jodelle, who at once recognised De Coucy's attendant, had no difficulty in deciding on the course he had to pursue. The Page evidently suspected him of something,

though of what, Jodelle of course could not be fully aware. De Coucy believed him (as he had taken care to give out) to be lying wounded in one of the houses of Mirebeau. If the Page then ever reached Mirebeau, his treachery would be instantly discovered ; and his enterprise consequently fail. It therefore followed, that without a moment's hesitation, it became quite as much Jodelle's determination to put the Page to death, as it was Ermold's to bestow the same fate on him ; and, with this sanguinary resolution on both sides, they instantly closed in mortal conflict.

Although, on the first view, such a struggle between a youth of eighteen and a vigorous man of five-and-thirty would seem most unequal, and completely in favour of the latter ; yet such was not entirely the case. Having served as page since a very early age, with so renowned a knight as Guy de Coucy, Ermold de Marcy had acquired not only a complete knowledge of the science of arms, but also that

dexterity and agility in their use, which nothing but practice can give.

Practice also certainly Jodelle did not want ; but Ermold's had been gained in the Holy Land, where the exquisite address of the Saracens in the use of the scymitar had necessitated additional study and exercise of the sword amongst the crusaders and their followers.

Ermold also was as active as the wind, and this fully compensated the want of Jodelle's masculine strength. But the Brabançois had unfortunately in his favour the advantage of armour, being covered with a light haubert,* which yielded to all the motions of his body,

* There are various differences of opinion concerning the persons to whom the use of the haubert was confined. Ducange implies, from a passage in Joinville, that this part of the ancient suits of armour was the privilege of a knight. Le Laboureur gives it also to a squire. But the Brabançois and other bands of adventurers did not subject themselves to any rules and regulations respecting their arms, as might be proved from a thousand different instances.

and with a steel bonnet, which defended his head ; while the poor Page had nothing but his green tunic, and his velvet cap and feather. It was in vain, therefore, that he exerted his skill and activity in dealing two blows for every one of his adversary's ; the only accessible part of Jodelle's person was his face, and that he took sufficient care to guard against attack.

The noise of clashing weapons brought the villagers to their doors ; but such things were too common in those days, and interference therein was too dangerous an essay for any one to meddle ; though some of the women cried out upon the strong man in armour, for drawing on the youth in the green cassock.

Ermold was nothing daunted by the disadvantage under which he laboured ; and after having struck at Jodelle's face, and parried all his blows, with admirable perseverance, for some minutes, he actually meditated running in upon the Brabançois ; confident that if he

could but get one fair blow at his throat, the combat would be at an end.

At that moment, however, it was interrupted in a different manner ; for a party of horsemen, galloping up into the village, came suddenly upon the combatants, and thrusting a lance between them, separated them for the time.

“ How now, masters ! how now ! ” cried the leader of the party, in rank Norman-French. “ Which is France, and which is England ?—But fight fair !—fight fair, i’ God’s name—Not a man against a boy,—not a steel haubert against a cloth jerkin.—Take hold of them, Robin, and bring them in here. I will judge their quarrel.”

So saying, the English Knight, for such he was who spoke, dismounted from his horse, and entered the very cottage from which Jodelle had issued a few minutes before. It seemed to be known as a place of entertainment, though no sign nor inscription announced the calling of its owner ; and the Knight, who bore the rough weather-beaten face of an old bluff soldier, sat

himself down in a settle, and leaning his elbow on the table, began to interrogate Ermold and the Brabançois, who were brought before him as he had commanded.

“And now Sir with the haubert,” said he, addressing Jodelle, apparently with that sort of instinctive antipathy, that the good sometimes feel, they scarce know why, towards the bad. “How came you, dressed in a coat of iron, to draw your weapon upon a beardless youth, with nothing to guard his limbs from your blows?”

“Though I deny your right to question me,” replied Jodelle, “I will tell you, to make the matter short, that I drew upon him, because he drew on me in the first place; but still more, because he is an enemy to my Lord, the King of England.”

“But thou art no Englishman, nor Norman either,” replied the Knight. “Thy tongue betrays thee. I have borne arms here, these fifty years, from boyhood to old age, and I know every jargon that is spoken in the King’s do-

minions, from Rouen to the mountains ; and thou speakest none. Thou art a Frenchman, of Provence, or thine accent lies."

" I may be a Frenchman, and yet serve the King of England," replied Jodelle boldly.

" God send him better servants than thou art, then !" replied the old Knight.—" Well, boy, what say'st thou ? Nay, look not sad, for that matter. We will not hurt thee, lad."

" You will hurt me, and you do hurt me," answered Ermold, " if you hold me here, and do not let me either cut out that villain's heart, or on to tell my Lord that he is betrayed."

" And who is thy Lord, boy ?" demanded the Knight, " English or French ?—and what is his name ?"

" French !" answered Ermold boldly, and with earnest pride he added : " he is the noble Sir Guy de Coucy."

" A good knight !—a good knight !" said the Englishman. " I have heard the heralds tell of him. A Crusader too — young, they say,

but very bold, and full of noble prowess: I should like to splinter a lance with him, in faith!"

"You need not baulk your liking, Sir Knight," answered the Page at once: "my master will meet you on horseback, or on foot, with what arms you will, and when:—give me but a glove to bear him as a gage, and you shall not be long without seeing him."

"Thou bearest thee like the page of such a knight," replied the Englishman; "and, in good truth, I have a mind to pleasure thee," he added, drawing off one of his gauntlets, as if about to send it to De Coucy; but whether such was his first intention or not, his farther determinations were changed by Jodelle demanding abruptly—"Know you the signature of King John, Sir Knight?"

"Surely! somewhat better than my own," answered the other,—"somewhat better than my own, which I have not seen for these forty years; and which, please God! I shall never see

again ; for my last will and testament, which was drawn by the holy Clerk of St. Anne's, two years and a half come St. Michael's, was stamped with my sword pommel, seeing that I had forgot how to write one-half the letters of my name, and the others were not readable.—But as to the King's, I'd swear to *it*."

" Well then," said Jodelle, laying a written paper before him, " you must know that ; and by that name I require you not only to let me pass free, but to keep yon youth prisoner as an enemy to the King."

" 'Tis sure enough the King's name in his own writing ; and there is the great seal too," said the old Knight. " This will serve your turn, Sir, as far as going away yourself,—but as to keeping the youth, I know nothing of that. The paper says nothing of that, as far as I can see."

" No ; it does not," said Jodelle ; " but still—"

" Oh, it does not, does not it?" said the

Englishman, giving back the paper. “ Thank you at least for that admission ; for, as to what the paper says, may I be confounded if I can read a word of it !”

“ Listen to me, however,” said Jodelle ; and approaching close to the English Knight, he whispered a few words in his ear.

The old man listened for a moment, with a grave and attentive face, bending his head and inclining his ear to the Brabançois’ communication. Then suddenly he turned round, and eyed him from head to foot with a glance of severe scorn. “ Open the door !” cried he to his men loudly—“ open the door ! By God I shall be suffocated !—I never was in a small room with such a damned rascal in my life before.—Let him pass ! let him pass ! and keep out of the way — take care his clothes do not touch you—it may be contagious ; and, by the Lord ! I would sooner catch the plague than such villainy as he is tainted withal.”

While surprised, and at first scarce grasping

their leader's meaning, the English troopers drew back from the Brabançois' path, as if he had been really a leper ; Jodelle strode to the door of the cottage, smothering the wrath he dared not vent. On the threshold, however, he paused ; and, turning towards the old soldier as if he would speak, glared on him for a moment with the glance of a wounded tiger ; but, whether he could find no words equal to convey the virulence of his passion, or whether prudence triumphed over anger, cannot be told, but he broke suddenly away, and catching his horse's bridle, sprang into the saddle and rode off at full speed.

“ I am afraid I must keep thee, poor youth,” said the old Knight,—“ I am afraid I must keep thee, whether I will or no. I should be blamed if I let thee go ; though, on my knightly honour, 'tis cursed hard to be obliged to keep a good honest youth like thee, and let a slave like that go free ! Nevertheless, you must stay here ; and if you try to make your escape, I do not

know what I must do to thee.—Robin,” he continued, turning to one of his men-at-arms, “put him into the back-chamber that looks upon the lane, and keep a good guard over him while I go on to the other village to see that Lord Pembroke’s quarters be prepared:—and hark ye,” he added, speaking in a lower voice, “leave the window open, and tie his horse under it, and there is a Gros Tournois for thee to drink the King’s health with the villagers and the other soldiers.—Do you understand?”

“Ay, Sir! ay!” answered the man-at-arms, “I understand, and will take care that your worship’s commands be obeyed.”

“ ’Tis a good youth,” said the old Knight, “and a bold, and the other was nothing but a pitiful villain, that will be hanged yet, if there be a tree in France to hang him on. Now, though I might be blamed if I let this lad go, and John might call me a hard-headed old fool, as once he did; yet I don’t know, Robin,—I don’t know whether in knightly honour I

should keep the true man prisoner and let the traitor go free.—I don't know, Robin,—I don't know!"

So saying, the good old soldier strode to the door; and the man he called Robin took poor Ermold into a small room at the back of the house, where he opened the window, saying something about not wishing to stifle him, and then left him, fastening the door on the other side.

The poor Page, however, bewildered with disappointment and distress, and stupefied by fatigue and want of sleep, had only heard the charge to guard him safely, without the after whisper, which neutralized that command; and, never dreaming that escape was possible, he sat down on the end of a truckle bed that occupied the greater part of the chamber, and gave himself up to his own melancholy thoughts. He once, indeed, thought of looking from the window, with a vague idea of freeing himself; but as he was about to proceed thither, the

sound of a soldier whistling, together with a horse's footsteps, convinced him that a guard was stationed there, and he abandoned his purpose. In this state he remained till grief and weariness proved too heavy for his young eyelids, and he fell asleep.

In the mean while, the old Knight, after being absent for more than three hours, returned to the village, which he had apparently often frequented before, and riding up to his man Robin, who was drinking with some peasants in the market-place, his first question was, "Where is the prisoner, Robin? I hope he has not escaped;" while a shrewd smile very potently contradicted the exact meaning of his words.

"Escaped!" exclaimed Robin: "God bless your worship! he cannot have escaped, without he got out of the window; for I left five men drinking in the front room."

"Let us see, Robin,—let us see!" said the old man. "Nothing like making sure, good

Robin ;" and he spurred on to the cottage, sprang from his horse like a lad ; and, casting the bridle to one of his men, passed through the front room to that where poor Ermold was confined.

Whatever had been his expectations, when he saw him sitting on the bed, just opening his heavy eyes at the sound of his approach, he could not restrain a slight movement of impatience. "The boy 's a fool !" muttered he,— "the boy 's a fool !" But then, recovering himself, he shut the door, and, advancing to the Page, he said,— "I am right glad, thou hast not tried to escape, my boy,—thou art a good lad and a patient ; but if ever thou shouldst escape, while under my custody, for 'tis impossible to guard every point, remember to do my greeting to your Lord, and tell him that I, Sir Arthur of Oakingham, will be glad to splinter a lance with him, in all love and courtesy."

The Page opened his eyes wide, as if he could scarce believe what he heard.

“ If he does not understand that,” said the old man to himself, “ he is a natural fool ! ” But to make all sure, he went to the narrow window, and leaning out, after whistling for a minute, he asked,—“ Is that your horse ? ’Tis a bonny beast, and a swift doubtless.— Well, Sir Page, fare thee well ! ” he added ; “ in an hour’s time I will send thee a stoup of wine, to cheer thee ! ” and, without more ado, he turned, and left the room once more, bolting the door behind him.

Ermold stood for a moment, as if surprise had benumbed his sinews ; but ’twas only for a moment ! for then, springing towards the casement, he looked out well on each side, thrust himself through, without much care either of his dress or his person ; and, springing to the ground, was in an instant on his horse’s back, and galloping away over the wide, uninclosed country, like Tam o’ Shanter with all the witches behind him.

For long he rode on, without daring to look

behind ; but when he did so, he found that he was certainly unpursued ; and proceeded, with somewhat of a slackened pace, in order to save his horse's strength. At the first cottage he came to, he inquired for Mirebeau ; but, by the utter ignorance of the serfs that inhabited it, even of the name of such a place, he found that he must be rather going away from the object of his journey than approaching it. At the castles he did not dare to ask ; for the barons of that part of the country were so divided between the two parties, that he would have thereby run fully as much chance of being detained as directed. At length, however, as the sun began to decline, he encountered a country-woman, who gave him some more correct information ; but told him, at the same time, that it would be midnight before he reached the place he sought.

Ermold went on undauntedly ; and only stopped for half an hour, to refresh his horse when the weary beast could hardly move its

limbs. Still he was destined to be once more turned from his path ; for, at the moment the sun was just going down, he beheld from the top of one of the hills, a large body of cavalry moving on in the valley below ; and the banners and ensigns which flaunted in the horizontal rays, left no doubt that they were English.

The Page was of course obliged to change his direction ; but as a fine starry night came on, he proceeded with greater ease ; for the woman's direction had been to keep due south, and in Palestine he had learned to travel by the stars. A thousand difficulties still opposed themselves to his way—a thousand times his horse's weariness obliged him to halt ; but he suffered not his courage to be shaken ; and, at last, he triumphed over all. As day began to break, he heard the ringing of a large church bell, and in ten minutes he stood upon the heights above Mirebeau. Banners, and pennons, and streamers, were dancing in the vale below ; and, for a

moment the Page paused, and glanced his eyes over the whole scene. As he did so, he turned as pale as death; and, suddenly drawing his rein, he wheeled to the right, and rode away in another direction, as fast as his weary horse would bear him.

CHAPTER XI.

WE seldom, in life, find ourselves more unpleasantly situated, than when, as is often the case, our fate and happiness are staked upon an enterprise in which many other persons are joined, whose errors or negligences counteract all our best endeavours, and whose conduct however much we disapprove, we cannot command.

Such was precisely the case with De Coucy, after the taking of the town of Mirebeau. The castle still held out, and laughed the efforts of their small force to scorn. Their auxiliaries had not yet come up. No one could gain precise information of the movements of King John's army; and yet, the Knights of Poitou

and Anjou passed their time in revelling and merriment in the town, pressing the siege of the castle vigorously during the day, but giving up the night to feasting and debauchery, and leading Prince Arthur, in the heedlessness of his youth, into the same improvident neglect as themselves.

When De Coucy urged the hourly danger to which they were exposed during the night, with broken gates, and an unrepaired wall, and pressed the necessity of throwing out guards and patrols, the only reply he obtained was, “Let the Brabançois patrol, — they were paid for such tedious service. They were excellent scouts too. None better! Let them play, sentinel. The knights and men-at-arms had enough to do during the day. As to King John, who feared him? Let him come. They would fight him.” So confident had they become from their first success against Mirebeau. De Coucy, however, shared not this confidence; but every night, as soon as the immediate ope-

rations against the castle had ceased, he left the wounded in the town, and retired, with the rest of his followers, to a small post he had established on a mound, at the distance of a double arrow shot from the fortress. His first care, after this, was to distribute the least fatigued of the Brabançois, in small parties, round the place, at a short distance from the walls ; so that, as far as they could be relied upon, the besiegers were secure against attack.

Still the young Knight, practised in the desultory warfare of the crusades, and accustomed to every sort of attack, both by night and day, neglected no precaution ; and, by establishing a patrol of his own tried attendants, each making the complete round of the posts once during the night ; while De Coucy himself never omitted to make the same tour twice between darkness and light, he seemed to insure also the faith of the Brabançois.

The fourth night had come, after the taking of the town ; and, wearied with the fatigues of

the day, De Coucy had slept for an hour or two, in one of the little huts of which he had formed his encampment. He was restless, however, even during his sleep, and towards eleven of the clock he rose, and proceeded to the watch-fire, at a short distance from which, the man who was next to make the round was sitting waiting his companion's return. The night was as black as ink. There was a sort of solid darkness in the air; but withal it was very warm; so that, though the light of the fire was very agreeable, its heat was not to be supported.

“Has all gone well?” demanded the Knight.

“All, beau Sire,” answered the man, “except that one of the Coterel's horses has got his foot in a hole, and slipped his fetlock.”

“Have you heard of his captain Jodelle?” demanded De Coucy. “Is he better of his hurt? We want all the men we have.”

“I have not seen him, beau Sire, because I have not been in the town,” replied the Squire;

“ but one of his fellows says, that he is very bad indeed ;—that the blow you dealt him, has knocked one of his eyes quite out.”

“ I am sorry for that,” said De Coucy. “ I meant not to strike so heavily. I will see him to-morrow before the attack. Bring me word, in the morning, what house he lies at ; and now mount, and begin your round, good Raoul. We will keep it up quickly to-night. I know not why, but I am not easy. I have a sort of misgiving that I seldom feel.—Hush ! What noise is that ?”

“ Oh, 'tis the folks singing in the town, beau Sire,” replied the man. “ They have been at it this hour. It comes from the Pré-vôt's garden. I heard Sir Savary de Maulèon say, as he rode by us, that he would sing the abbess of the convent a lay to-night, for the love of her sweet eyes.”

A gust of wind now brought the sounds nearer ; and De Coucy heard, more distinctly, that it was as the man-at-arms had said. The

dull tones of a rote, with some voices singing, mingled with the merry clamour of several persons laughing ; and the general hum of more quiet conversation told that the gay nobles of Poitou were prolonging the revel late.

De Coucy bade the man go ; and in a few minutes after, when the other, who had been engaged in making the rounds, returned, the Knight himself mounted a fresh horse, and rode round in various directions, sometimes visiting the posts, sometimes pushing his search into the country ; for, with no earthly reason for suspicion, he felt more troubled and anxious, than if some inevitable misfortune were about to fall upon him. At about three in the morning he returned, and found Hugo de Barre, by the light of the watch-fire, waiting his turn to ride on the patrol.

“ How is thy wound, Hugo ? ” demanded De Coucy, springing to the ground.

“ Oh, 'tis nothing, Sir Guy ! — 'tis nothing ! ” replied the stout Squire. “ God send me never

worse than that, and my bargain would be soon made!"

"Has all been still?" demanded the Knight.

"All! save a slight rustling I thought I heard on yonder hill," replied Hugo. "It sounded like a far horse's feet."

"Thou hast shrewd ears, good Hugo," answered his Lord. "'Twas I rode across it some half an hour ago or less."

"'Tis that the night is woundy still," replied the Squire, "one might hear a fly buzz at a mile; 'tis as hot as Palestine too.—Think you, beau Sire," he added somewhat abruptly, "that 'twill be long before this castle falls?"

"Nine months and a day! good Hugo," answered the Knight,—"nine months and a day! without our reinforcements come up.—How would you have us take it? We have no engines. We have neither mangonel, nor catapult, nor pierrier to batter the wall, nor ladders, nor moving tower to storm it."

"I would fain be on to La' Flêche, beau

Sire," said Hugo, laughing. " 'Tis that makes me impatient."

" And why to La Flêche?" demanded De Coucy. " Why there, more than to any other town of Maine or Normandy?"

" Oh, I forgot, Sire. You were not there," said the Squire, " when the packman at Tours told Ermold de Marcy and me, that Sir Julian, and the Lady Isadore, and Mistress Alixe, and little Eleonor, and all, are at La Flêche."

" Ha!" said De Coucy, " and this cursed castle is keeping us here for ages, and those wild knights of Poitou lying there in the town, and spending the time in foolish revel that would take twenty castles if well employed."

" That is what Gallon the Fool said yesterday," rejoined Hugo.—" God forgive me for putting you, Sire, and Gallon together! But he said, ' If those Poitevins would but dine as heartily on stone-walls as they do on cranes and capons, and toss off as much water as they do

wine, they would drink the ditch dry, and swallow the castle, before three days were out.' ”

“ On my life ! he said not amiss,” replied De Coucy.—“ Where is poor Gallon ? I have not seen him these two days.”

“ He keeps to the town, beau Sire,” replied Hugo, “ to console the good wives, as he says.—But here comes Henry Carvel from the rounds, or I am mistaken. Yet the night is so dark, one would see not a camel, at a yard’s distance.—Ho, stand ! Give the word !”

“ Arthur !” replied the soldier, and dismounted by the watch-fire. Hugo de Barre sprang on his horse, and proceeded on his round ; while De Coucy, casting himself down in the blaze, prepared to watch out the night by the sentinel, who was now called to the guard.

It were little amusing to trace De Coucy’s thoughts. A knight of that day would have deemed it almost a disgrace to divide the neces-

sary anxieties of the profession of arms, with any other idea than that of his lady love. However the caustic pen of Cervantes, whose chivalrous spirit—of which I am bold to say, no man ever originally possessed more—had early been crushed by ingratitude and disappointment—however his pen may have given an aspect of ridicule to the deep devotion of the ancient knights towards the object of their love;—however true it may be, that that devotion was not always of as pure a kind as fancy has pourtrayed it; yet the love of the chivalrous ages was a far superior feeling to the calculating transaction so termed in the present day; and if perhaps it was rude in its forms, and extravagant in its excess, it had at least the energy of passion, and the sublimity of strength. De Coucy watched and listened; but still, while he did so, he thought of Isadore of the Mount, and he called up her loveliness, her gentleness, her affection. Every glance of her soft dark eyes, every tone of her sweet lip,

was food for memory ; and the young Knight deemed that surely for such glances and such tones a brave man might conquer the world.

The night, as we have seen, had been sultry, and the sky dark ; and it was now waxing towards morning ; but no cool breeze announced the fresh rising of the day. The air was heavy and close, as if charged with the matter for a thousand storms ; and the wind was as still, as if no quickening wing had ever stirred the thick and lazy atmosphere. Suddenly a sort of rolling sound seemed to disturb the air ; and De Coucy sprang upon his feet to listen. A moment of silence elapsed, and then a bright flash of lightning blazed across the sky, followed by a clap of thunder :—De Coucy listened still. “It could not be distant thunder,” he thought,—“the sound he had first heard. He had seen no previous lightning.”

He now distinctly heard a horse’s feet coming towards him ; and, a moment after, the voice of Hugo de Barre speaking to some one else :

“ Come along, Sir Gallon, quick !” cried he.
“ You must tell it to my Lord himself.—By heaven ! if 'tis a jest, you should not have made it ; and if 'tis not a jest, he must hear it.”

“ Ha, haw !” cried Gallon the Fool.—“ Ha, haw ! If 'tis a jest, 'tis the best I ever made, for it is true,—and truth is the best jest in the calendar.—Why don't they make Truth a saint, Hugo ? Haw, haw ! Haw, haw ! When I 'm Pope, I 'll make St. Truth to match St. Ruth ; and when I 've done, I shall have made the best saint in the pack.—Haw, haw ! Haw, haw ! But, by the Lord ! some one will soon make Saint Lie to spite me ; and no one will pray to Saint Truth afterwards.—Haw ! haw ! haw !—But there 's De Coucy standing by the watch-fire, like some great Devil in armour, broiling the souls of the damned.—Haw ! haw ! haw !”

“ What is the matter, Hugo ?” cried the Knight, advancing. “ Why are you dragging along poor Gallon so ?”

“ Because poor Gallon lets him,” cried the

Juggler, freeing himself from the Squire's grasp, by one of his almost supernatural springs.—“ Haw haw ! Where's poor Gallon now ?”—and he bounded up to the place where the Knight stood, and cast himself down by the fire, exclaiming,—“ Oh rare ! 'Tis a sweet fire, in this sultry night.—Haw, haw ! Are you cold, De Coucy !”

“ I am afraid, my Lord, there is treason going forward,” said Hugo de Barre, riding up to his master, and speaking in a low voice. “ I had scarce left you, when Gallon came bounding up to me, and began running beside my horse, saying, in his wild way, he would tell me a story. I heeded him little at first ; but when he began to tell me that this Brabançois,—this Jodelle—has not been lying wounded a-bed, but has been away these two days on horseback, and came back into the town towards dusk last night, I thought it right to bring him hither.”

“ You did well,” cried De Coucy,—“ you

did well ! I will speak with him—I observed some movement amongst the Brabançois as we returned.—Go quietly, Hugo, and give a glance into their huts, while I speak with the Juggler.—Ho, good Gallon, come hither ?”

“ You won’t beat me ?” cried Gallon,—“ ha ?”

“ Beat thee ! no, on my honour !” replied De Coucy ; and the mad Juggler crept up to him on all-fours.—“ Tell me, Gallon,” continued the Knight ; “ is what you said to Hugo true about Jodelle ?”

“ The good King Christopher had a cat !” replied Gallon. “ You said you would not beat me, Coucy ; but your eyes look very like as if your fist itched to give the lie to your honour.”

“ Nay, nay, Gallon,” said De Coucy, striving by gentleness to get a moment of serious reason from him. “ My own life—the safety of the camp—of Prince Arthur—of our whole party, may depend upon your answer. I have heard you say that you are a Christian man,

and kept your faith, even while a slave amongst the Saracens ; now answer me. Do you know for certain, that Jodelle has been absent, as you told your friend Hugo ? Speak the truth, upon your soul !”

“ Not upon my soul !—not upon my soul !” cried Gallon. “ As to my having a soul, that is all a matter of taste and uncertainty ; but what I said was true, upon my nose, which no one will deny—Turk or Christian, fool or philosopher. On my nose, it was true, Coucy—on my nose !”

“ By heaven ! if this prove false, I will cut it off !” cried the Knight, frowning on him.

“ Do so, do so ! beau Sire,” replied Gallon, grinning ; “ and when you have got it, God give you grace to wear it !”

“ Now, Hugo de Barre !” cried the Knight, as his Squire returned with a quick pace.

“ As I hope for salvation, Sir Guy,” cried Hugo, “ there are not ten of the Cote-reaux in the huts ! Those that are there are

sleeping quietly enough, but all the rest are gone!"

"Lord! what a flash!" cried Gallon, as the lightning gleamed round about them, playing on the armour of De Coucy and his Squire.

"Ha, Hugo! did you see nothing in that valley?" exclaimed the Knight.

"Lances, as I live!" answered the Squire.
"We are betrayed to the English, Sire!"

"We may reach the town yet, and save the Prince!" exclaimed the Knight.—"Wake the vassals, and the Brabançois that are left! The traitor thought them too true to be trusted: we will think them true too.—Be quick, but silent! Bid them not speak a word!"

Each man started up in his armour, as he was awoke; for De Coucy had not permitted them to disarm during the siege; and, being ranged in silence behind the Knight, the small party that were left began to descend towards the town on foot, and unknowing what duty they were going upon.

Between the castle and the hill on which De Coucy had established his post was a small ravine, the entrance of which, nearest the town, exactly fronted the breach that he had formerly effected in the wall. In the bottom ran a quick but shallow stream, which, brawling amongst some large stones, went on murmuring towards the castle, the ditch of which it supplied with water. Leading his men down into the hollow, the young Knight took advantage of the stream, and by making his soldiers advance through the water, covered the clank of their armour with the noise of the rivulet. The most profound darkness hung upon their way ; but, during the four days they had been there, each man had become perfectly acquainted with the ground, so that they were advancing rapidly ; when suddenly a slight measured sound, like the march of armed men over soft turf, caused De Coucy to halt. “Stop !” whispered he ; “they are between us and the walls. We shall have a flash presently. Down behind the bushes, and we shall see !”

As he expected, it was not long before the lightning again blazed across, and showed them a strong body of infantry marching along in line, between the spot where he stood and the walls.

“ Hugo,” whispered the Knight, “ we must risk all. They are surrounding the town; but the southern gate must still be open. We must cut through them, and may still save the Prince. Let each man remember his task is, to enter the house of the *Prévôt*, and carry Arthur Plantagenet out, whether he will or not, by the southern gate. A thousand marks of silver to the man who sets him in the streets of Paris;—follow silently till I give the word.”

This was said like lightning, and leading onward with a quick but cautious step, De Coucy had advanced so far, that he could hear the footfall of each armed man in the enemy’s ranks, and the rustling of their close pressed files against each other, when the blaze of the lightning discovered his party also to those against whom they were advancing. It gleamed

as brightly as if the flash had been actually between them, showing to De Coucy the corslets and pikes and grim faces of the English soldiers within twenty yards of where he stood ; while they suddenly perceived a body of armed men approaching towards them, whose numbers the duration of the lightning was not sufficient to display.

“A Coucy! a Coucy!” shouted the Knight, giving the signal to advance, and rushing forward with that overwhelming impetuosity which always casts so much in favour of the attacking party. Unacquainted with the ground, taken by surprise, uncertain to whom, or to what, they were opposed, the Norman and English soldiers, for the moment, gave way in confusion. Two went down in a moment before De Coucy’s sword ; a third attempted to grapple with him, but was dashed to the earth in an instant ; a fourth retired fighting towards the wall.

De Coucy pressed upon him as a man whose all—honour, fortune, existence—is staked upon

his single arm. Hugo and his followers thronged after, widening the breach he had hewn in the enemy's ranks. The soldier who fronted him struck wild, reeled, staggered under his blows, and stumbling over the ruins of the fallen tower, was trodden under his feet. On rushed De Coucy towards the breach, seeing nought in the darkness, hearing nought in the tumult, his quick and bloody passage had occasioned.

But suddenly the bright blue lightning flashed once more across his path.—What was it he beheld? The lion banner of England planted in the breach, with a crowd of iron forms around it, and a forest of spears shining from beyond.

“ Back! back, my Lord!” cried Hugo: “ the way is clear behind ;—back to the hill, while we can pass !”

Back like lightning De Coucy trod his steps, but with a different order of march from what he had pursued in advancing. Every man of his train went now before him ; and though his

passage had been but for an instant, and the confusion it had occasioned great, yet the English soldiers were now pressing in upon him on all sides, and hard was the task to clear himself of their ranks. The darkness, however, favoured him, and his superior knowledge of the ground; and, hastening onward, contenting himself with striking only where his passage was opposed, he gradually fought his way out—foiled one or two that attempted to pursue him—gained the hill, and, mounting it with the swiftness of an arrow sped from the bow, he at length rallied his men in the midst of the little huts in which he had lodged his soldiers after the taking of the town.

“ Haw, haw ! beau Sire ! Haw, haw !” cried Gallon the Fool, who had never stirred from the fire, although the heat was intense ; “ so you have come back again.—But I can tell you, that if you like to go down the other way, you may have just as good a dish of fighting ; for I saw, but now, the postern of the castle open,

and a whole troop of spears wind down behind us.—Haw, haw ! haw, haw !”

“ Now, for the last chance, Hugo !” cried the Knight.—“ To horse, to horse !”

Each man detached his beast from the spot where they stood ready, and sprang into the saddle, doubting not that their daring leader was about to attempt to cut his way through ; but De Coucy had very different thoughts.

“ There is the day breaking,” cried he ; “ we must be quick. In the confusion that must reign in the town the Prince may escape, if we can but draw the Normans’ attention hitherward.—Gallon, a fitting task for you ! Take some of those brands, and set fire to all the huts. Quick ! the day is rising !”

“ Haw, haw !” cried Gallon, delighted.—“ Haw, haw !” and in an astonishingly short space of time he had contrived to communicate the flame to the greater part of the hovels, which, constructed principally of dry branches, were easily ignited.

“ Now !” cried De Coucy, “ each man his horn to his lips ! and let him blow a flourish, as if he were saluting the royal standard.”

De Coucy himself set the example, and the long, loud, united notes rang far over the town.

So far as calling the attention of the English army below, the plan perfectly succeeded ; and indeed, even made the greater part both of the knights and men-at-arms believe that Arthur was without the town.

All eyes were turned now towards the little hill, where, clearly defined in the red light of the burning huts, stood the small party of horsemen, hanging a dark black spot upon the very verge, backed by the blaze of the conflagration. They might easily be mistaken for a group of Knights ; and a little wood of birches some way behind, looked not unlike a considerable clump of spears. To such a point, indeed, was Lord Pembroke himself deceived, that he judged it fit to move a strong body of horse round to the right of the hill, thus hem-

ming in the Knight between the town and the castle.

De Coucy saw the movement, and rejoiced in it. Nor did he move a step, as long as the fire of the huts continued to blaze ; wishing, as far as possible, to embarrass the enemy by the singularity of his behaviour, in the faint hope that every additional cause of confusion, joined to those which must always attend a night-attack, might in some degree facilitate the escape of the Prince.

The fire however expired, and the grey light of the morning was beginning to spread more and more over the scene, when De Coucy turned his rein, and, skirting round the little birch wood we have mentioned, at last endeavoured to force his way through the iron toils that were spread around him. To the right, as he wheeled round the wood, the early light showed the strong body of cavalry Lord Pembroke had thrown forward. On his left now lay the castle, and straight before him a body

of archers that had issued from thence with the Earl of Salisbury and half-a-dozen knights at their head. De Coucy hesitated not a moment, but laid his lance in the rest, and galloped forward to the attack of the latter at full speed.

One of the knights rode out before the rest to meet him ; but went down, horse and man, before his spear, and rolled on the plain, with the iron of the lance broken off deep in his breast. On spurred De Coucy, swinging his battle-axe over the head of a Norman who followed, when his horse, unfortunately, set his foot on the carcase of the fallen man — slipped — fell irrecoverably, and the Knight was hurled to the ground.

He sprang on his feet, however, in a moment, and, catching the bridle of Lord Salisbury's horse, dashed the iron chamfron to atoms with his battle-axe, and hurled the animal reeling on his haunches. The Earl spurred up his charger. “ Yield ! yield ! De

Coucy!" cried he; — "Good treatment! Fair ransom! William's friendship! Yield you, or you die!"

"Never!" exclaimed De Coucy, turning; and at a single blow striking down a man on foot that pressed upon him behind; — "never will I be John of England's prisoner!"

"Be Salisbury's! — be William Longsword's!" shouted the Earl loudly, eager to save his noble foe from the lances that were now bearing him down on all sides. But De Coucy still raged like a lion in the toils; and, alone in the midst of his enemies, — for the ranks had closed round and cut him off even from the aid of his little band — he continued for many minutes to struggle with a host, displaying that fearful courage which gained him a name throughout all Europe.

At length, however, while pressed upon in front by three lances, a powerful man-at-arms behind him, raised above his head a mace, that would have felled Goliah. The Knight turned

his head ; but to parry it was impossible ; for both his sword and shield arm were busy in defending himself from the spears of the enemy in front ; and he must have gone down before the blow like a felled ox, had not Lord Salisbury sprung to the ground, and interposed the shield, which hung round his own neck, in a slanting direction between the tremendous mace and De Coucy's helmet. The blow however fell ; and, though turned aside by William Longsword's treble target, its descent drove the Earl's arm down upon De Coucy's head, and made them both stagger.

“ Salisbury, I yield me !” cried De Coucy, dropping his battle-axe : “ rescue or no rescue, generous enemy, I am thy true prisoner ; and thereunto I give thee my faith. But as thou art a Knight, and a noble, yield me not to thy bad brother John. We know too well how he treats his prisoners.”

“ Salisbury's honour for your surety, brave De Coucy !” replied the Earl, clasping him in

his mailed arms, and giving a friendly shake, as if in reproach for the long protracted struggle he had maintained. “ By the Lord ! old friend, when you fought by my side in Palestine, you were but a whelp, where you are now a lion ! But know ye not yet, the town has been in our hands this hour, and my fair nephew Arthur taken in his bed, with all the wild revellers of Poitou, as full of wine as leathern bottles ?”

“ Alas ! I fear for the Prince !” cried De Coucy, “ in his bad uncle’s hands.”

“ Hush ! hush !” replied Salisbury. “ John is my brother, though I be but a bastard. He has pledged his word too, I hear, to treat his nephew nobly. So let us to the town, where we shall hear more. In the mean while, however, let me send to the Earl of Pembroke ; for, by the manœuvres he is making, he seems as ignorant of what has taken place in the town, as you were. Now let us on.”

CHAPTER XII.

WE must change the scene once more, and return to the palace of Philip Augustus. The whirlwind of passion had passed by; but the deep pangs of disappointed expectation, with a long train of gloomy suspicions and painful anticipations, swelled in the bosom of the Monarch, like those heavy, sweeping billows which a storm leaves behind on the long-agitated sea.

Philip Augustus slowly mounted the stairs of the great keep of the castle, pausing at every two or three steps, as if even the attention necessary to raise his foot from the one grade to the other interrupted the deep current of his thoughts. So profound indeed were those

thoughts, that he never even remarked the presence of Guerin, till at length, at the very door of the Queen's apartments, the Minister beseeched him to collect himself.

“ Remember, Sire,” said the Bishop, “ that no point of the lady's conduct is reproachable ; and, for Heaven's sake ! yield not your noble mind to any fit of passion that you may repent of hereafter !”

“ Fear not, Guerin,” replied the King : “ I am as cool as snow ;” and opening the door, he pushed aside the tapestry and entered.

Agnes had heard the step, but it was so different from her husband's general pace, that she had not believed it to be his. When she beheld him, however, a glow of bright, unspeakable joy, which in itself might have convinced the most suspicious, spread over her countenance.

Philip was not proof against it ; and as she sprang forward to meet him, he kissed her cheek, and pressed her in the wonted embrace. But there is nought so pertinacious on earth as

Suspicion. 'Tis the fiend's best, most persevering servant. Cast it from us with what force we will—crush it under what weight of reasoning we may, once born in the human heart, it still rises on its invisible ladder, and squeezes its little drop of corroding poison into every cup we drink.

The Queen's women left the room, and Philip sat down by the embroidery frame where Agnes had been working before she went out. He still held her hand in his, as she stood beside him; but, fixing his eyes upon the embroidery, he was in a moment again lost in painful thought, though his hand every now and then contracted on the small fingers they grasped, with a sort of habitual fondness.

Agnes was surprised and pained at this unwonted mood; and yet, she would not deem it coldness, or say one word that might irritate her husband's mind; so that for long, she left him to think in silence, seeing that something most agonizing must evidently have happened, so to absorb his ideas, even beside her.

At length, however, without making a motion to withdraw her hand, she sunk slowly down upon her knees beside him ; and, gazing up in his face, she asked, “ Do you not love me, Philip ? ” in a low sweet tone, that vibrated through his soul to all the gentler and dearer feelings of his heart.

“ Love you, Agnes ! ” cried he, throwing his arms round her beautiful form, and pressing kiss upon kiss on her lips — “ love you ! Oh God ! how deeply ! ” He gazed on her face for a moment or two, with one of those long, straining, wistful glances that we sometimes give to the dead ; then, starting up, he paced the room for several minutes, murmuring some indistinct words to himself, till at length his steps grew slower again, his lips ceased to move, and he once more fell into deep meditation.

Agnes rose, and, advancing towards him, laid her hand affectionately upon his arm. “ Calm yourself, Philip. Come and sit down again ;

and tell your Agnes what has disturbed you. Calm yourself, beloved ! Oh, calm yourself !”

“ Calm, Madam !” said the King, turning towards her with an air of cold abstraction. “ How would you have me calm ?”

Agnes let her hand drop from his arm ; and, returning to her seat, she bent her head down and wept silently.

Philip took another turn in the chamber, during which he twice turned his eyes upon the figure of his wife—then, advanced towards her, and leaning down, cast his arm over her neck. “ Weep not, dear Agnes !” he said, — “ weep not ; I have many things to agitate and distress me. You must bear with me, and let my humour have its way.”

Agnes looked up, and kissed the lips that spoke to her, through her tears. She asked no questions, however, lest she might recall whatever was painful to her husband’s mind. Philip too glanced not for a moment towards the real cause of his agitation. There was some-

thing so pure, so tender, so beautiful, in the whole conduct and demeanour of his wife—so full of the same affection towards him, that he felt towards her—so unmixed with the least touch of that constraint that might make her love doubted, that his suspicions stood reproved, and though they rankled still, he dared not own them.

“Can it be only a feeling of cold duty binds her to me thus?” he asked himself; “she cited nought else to support her resolution of not flying with that pale seducer D’Auvergne; and yet, see how she strives for my affection! how she seems to fix her whole hopes upon it! —how to see it shaken agitates her!”

The fiend had his answer ready. It might be pride,—the fear of sinking from the Queen of a great kingdom, back into the daughter of a petty Prince. It might be vanity—which would be painfully wrung to leave splendour, and riches, and admiration of a world, to become—what?—what *had been*, the wife of a

great king — a lonely, unnoticed outcast from her *once husband's* kingdom. Still, he thought it was impossible. She had never loved splendour;—she had never sought admiration. Her delights had been with him alone, in sports and amusements that might be tasted, with any one beloved, even in the lowest station. It was impossible;—and yet it rankled. He felt he wronged her. He was ashamed of it;—and yet those thoughts rankled! Memory too dwelt with painful accuracy upon those words he had overheard, — *notwithstanding her own feelings, she would not quit him!*—and imagination, with more skill than the best sophist of the court of Crœsus, drew therefrom matter to basis a thousand painful doubts.

As thus, he thought, he cast himself again into the seat before the frame; and his mind being well prepared for every bitter and sorrowful idea, he gave himself up to the gloomy train of fancies that pressed on him on every side:—the revolt of his barons—the disaffection

of his allies—the falling off of his friends—the exhaustion of his finances—and last, not least, that dreadful Interdict, that cut his kingdom off from the Christian world, and made it like a lazar house. He resolved all the horrible proofs of the Papal power, that he had seen on his way—the young, the old, clinging to his stirrup and praying relief,—the dead, the dying, exposed by the road-side to catch his eye—the gloomy silence of the cities and the fields—the death-like void of all accustomed sounds, that spread around his path wherever he turned—he thought over them all; and, as he thought, he almost unconsciously took up the chalk wherewith Agnes had been tracing the figures on her embroidery, and slowly scrawled upon the edge of the frame, “*Interdict! Interdict!*”

She had watched his motions as a mother watches those of her sick child; but, when she read the letters he had written, a faint cry broke from her lips, and she became deadly

pale. The conviction that Philip's resolution was shaken by the thunders of the Roman Church took full possession of her mind, and she saw that the moment was arrived for her to make her own peace the sacrifice for his. She felt her fate sealed,—she felt her heart broken; and though she had often, often contemplated the chances of such a moment, how trifling, how weak, had been the very worst dreams of her imagination, to the agony of the reality!

She repressed the cry, however, already half uttered; and rising from her seat with her determination fixed, and her mind made up to the worst evil that fate could inflict, she kneeled down at the King's feet, and, raising her eyes to his, "My Lord," she said, "the time is come for making you a request that I am sure you will not refuse. Your own repose, your kingdom's welfare, and the Church's peace require—all and each—that you should consent to part from one who has been too long an

object of painful contest. Till I thought that the opinion of your prelates and your peers had gained over your will to such a separation, I never dared, my noble Lord, even to think thereof; but now you are doubtless convinced that it must be so; and all I have to beg is, that you would give me sufficient guard and escort, to conduct me safely to my father's arms; and that you would sometimes think, with tenderness, of one who has loved you well."

Agnes spoke as calmly as if she had asked some simple boon. Her voice was low but clear; and the only thing that could betray agitation, was the excessive rapidity of her utterance, seeming as if she doubted her own powers to bring her request to an end.

Philip gazed upon her with a glance of agony and surprise, that were painful even to behold. His cheek was as pale as death; but his brow was flushed and red; and as she proceeded, the drops of agony stood upon his temples. When

she had done, he strove to speak, but no voice answered his will ; and after gasping as for breath, he started up, exclaimed with great effort, “ Oh, Agnes !” and darted out of the chamber.

At ten paces’ distance from the door stood Guerin, as if in expectation of the King’s return. Philip caught him by the arm, and, scarcely conscious of what he did, pointed wildly with the other hand to the door of the Queen’s apartments.

“ Good God ! my Lord,” cried the Minister, well knowing the violent nature of his master’s passion. “ In Heaven’s name ! what have you done ?”

“ Done ! done !” cried the Monarch. “ Done ! She loves me not, Guerin ! She seeks to quit me. She loves me not, I say ! She loves me not ! I, that would have sacrificed my soul for her ! I, that would have abjured the cross—embraced the crescent—desolated Europe—died myself, for her. She seeks to leave me !

Oh, madness and fury!" and clenching his hands, he stamped with his armed heel upon the ground, till the vaulted roofs of the keep echoed and re-echoed to the sound.

"Oh! my Lord! be calm, in Heaven's name!" cried Guerin. "Speak not such wild and daring words! Remember, though you be a king, there is a King still higher; who perhaps even now chastens you for resisting his high will."

"Away!" cried the King. "School not me, Sir Bishop! I tell thee, there is worse hell *here*, than if there had never been Heaven;" and he struck his hand upon his mailed breast with fury, indeed almost approaching to insanity.—"Oh, Guerin, Guerin!" he cried again, after a moment's pause, "she would leave me! Did you hear? She would leave me!"

"Let me beseech you, Sire," said the Minister once more. "Compose yourself, and, as a wise and good prince, let the discomfort and misery that Heaven has sent to yourself, at

least be turned to your people's good ; and, by so doing, be sure that you will merit of Heaven some consolation."

"Consolation!" said the Monarch mournfully. "Oh, my friend, what consolation can I have? She loves me not, Guerin! She seeks to quit me! What consolation can I have under that?"

"At least, the consolation, Sire, of relieving and restoring happiness to your distressed people," answered the Minister. "The Queen herself seeks to quit you, Sire. The Queen herself prays you to yield to the authority of the Church. After that, you will surely never think of detaining her against her will. It would be an impious rebellion against a special manifestation of Heaven's commands ; for, sure I am, that nothing but the express conviction, that it is God's will, would have induced the Princess to express such a desire as you have vaguely mentioned."

"Do you think so, Guerin?" demanded

Philip, musing — “ do you think so ? But no, no ! She would never quit me if she loved me ? ”

“ Her love for you, my Lord, may be suspended by the will of Heaven,” replied the Minister ; “ for surely she never showed want of love towards you till now. Yield then, my Lord, to the will of the Most High. Let the Queen depart ; and, indeed, by so doing, I believe, that even your own fondest hopes may be gratified. Our Holy Father the Pope, you know, would not even hear the question of divorce tried, till you should show your obedience to the Church by separating from the Queen. When you have done so, he has pledged himself to examine in the true apostolic spirit ; and doubtless he will come to the same decision as your bishops of France had done before. Free from all ties, you may then recall the Queen—”

“ But her love ! ” interrupted Philip,—“ can I ever recall her love ? ”

“ If it be by the will of Heaven,” replied Guerin, “ that she seeks to leave you, her love for you, my Lord, will not be lost, but increased a thousand fold when Heaven’s blessing sanctions it: and the Pope—”

“ Curses upon his head !” thundered Philip, bursting forth into a new frenzy of passion,— “ may pride and ambition be a curse on him and his successors for ever ! May they grasp at the power of others, till they lose their own ! May nation after nation cast off their sway ! and itch of dominion, with impotence of means, be their damnation for ever ! Now I have given him back his curse—say, what of him ?”

“ Nothing, my Lord,” replied Guerin ; “ but, that the only means to make him consent to your union with the Princess, is to part with her for a time.—Oh, my Lord ! if you have not already consented,—consent, I beseech you : she prays it herself. Do not refuse her—your kingdom requires it : have compassion upon it. Your own honour is implicated ; for

your barons rebel, and you never can chastise them while the whole realm is bound to their cause by the strong bond of mutual distress."

"Chastise them!" said Philip thoughtfully, pausing on the ideas the Minister had suggested. Then suddenly he turned to Guerin with his brow knit, and his cheek flushed, as if with the struggle of some new resolution. "Be it so, Guerin!" cried he,—"be it so! The interdict shall be raised—I will take them, one by one—I will cut them into chaff, and scatter them to the wind—I will be King of France indeed! and, if in the mean while this proud Prelate yields me my wife—my own beloved wife—why well; but if he dares then refuse his sanction, when I have bowed my rebellious subjects, his seat is but a frail one; for I will march on Rome, and hurl him from his chair, and send him forth to tread the sands of Palestine.—But stay, Guerin. Think you, that on examination he will con-

firm the Bishop's decree, if I yield for the time?"

"I trust he will, my Lord," replied the Minister.—"May I tell the Queen you grant her request?" he added, eager to urge Philip's indecision into the irrevocable.

"Yes!" said the Monarch, "yes!—Yet stay, Guerin,—stay!" and he fell into thought again; when suddenly some one mounting the steps like lightning approached the little vestibule where they stood. "Ha! have you taken the Count D'Auvergne?" cried the King, seeing one of his sergeants-of-arms—his eyes flashing at the same time with all their former fury.

"No, my Lord," replied the man: "he has not yet been heard of; but a messenger, in breathless haste, from the Bishop of Tours, brings you this packet, Sire. He says, Prince Arthur is taken," added the Sergeant.

"Avert it, Heaven!" exclaimed Philip, tearing open the despatch. "Too true! too true!" he added: "and the people of Poitou in revolt!

laying the misfortune to our door, for resisting the Interdict.—Oh, Guerin ! it must be done—it must be done ! The interdict must be raised, or all is lost.—Begone, fellow ; leave us !” he exclaimed, turning to the sergeant, who tarried for no second command. Then, pacing up and down for an instant, with his eyes bent on the ground, the King repeated more than once : “ She seeks to leave me ! she spoke of it as calmly as a hermit tells his beads.—She loves me not !—Too true, she loves me not !”

“ May I announce your will in this respect, my Lord ?” demanded Guerin, as the King paused and pondered bitterly over all that had passed.

“ Ask me not, good friend !—ask me not !” replied the King, turning away his head, as if to avoid facing the act to which his Minister urged him. “ Ask me not.—Do what thou wilt ; there is my signet,—use it wisely ; but tear not my heart, by asking commands I cannot utter.”

Thus speaking, the King drew his private seal from his finger, and placing it in Guerin's hand, turned away ; and, with a quick but irregular step, descended the staircase, passed through the gardens, and issuing out by the postern gate, plunged into the very heart of the forest.

Guerin paused to collect his thoughts, scarcely believing the victory that had been obtained ; so little had he expected it in the morning. He then approached the door of the Queen's apartments, and knocked gently for admittance. At first it passed unnoticed, but on repeating it somewhat louder, one of Agnes's women presented herself, with a face of ashy paleness, while another looked over her shoulder.

“Enter, my Lord Bishop, enter !” said the second in a low voice. “Thank God, you are come ! We know not what has so struck the Queen ; but she is very ill. She speaks not ; she raises not her head ; and yet by her sobbing 'tis clear she has not fainted. See where she lies !”

Guerin entered. From Philip's account, he had thought to find the Queen with a mind composed and made up to her fortunes; but a sadly different scene presented itself. Agnes had apparently, the moment her husband had left her, caught down the crucifix from a little moveable oratory which stood in the room, and throwing herself on her knees before one of the seats, had been seeking consolation in prayer. The emotions which crossed her address to Heaven, may easily be conceived; and so powerfully had they worked, that, overcoming all other thoughts, they seemed to have swept hope and trust, even in the Almighty, away before them, and dashed the unhappy girl to the ground like a stricken flower. Her head and whole person had fallen forward on the cushion of the seat, before which she had been kneeling. Her face was resting partly on her hands, and partly on the cross, which they clasped, and which was deluged with her tears; while a succession of short convulsive sobs was all that announced her to be amongst the living.

“Has she not spoken since the King left her?” demanded Guerin, both alarmed and shocked.

“Not a word, Sir,” replied her principal attendant. “We heard her move once, after the King’s voice ceased; and then came a dead silence: so we ventured to come in, lest she should have fallen into one of those swoons which have afflicted her ever since the tournament of the Champeaux. We have striven to raise her, and to draw some word from her; but she lies there, and sobs, and answers nothing.”

“Send for Rigord the leech,” said Guerin; “I saw him in the hall;” and then approaching Agnes, with a heart deeply touched with the sorrow he beheld, “Grieve not so, Lady,” he said in a kindly voice; “I trust that this will not be so heavy a burden as you think: I doubt not—indeed I doubt not, that a short separation from your royal husband will be all that you will have to bear. The King having once,

by your good counsel, submitted his cause to the trial of the Holy Church, our good Father, the Pope, will doubtless judge mildly, and soon restore to him the treasure he has lost. Bear up then, sweet lady, bear up ! and be sure that wherever you go, the blessings of a whole nation, which your self-devotion has saved from civil war and misery of every kind, will follow your footsteps, and smooth your way."

It was impossible to say whether Agnes heard him or not ; but the words of comfort which the good Bishop proffered produced no effect. She remained with her face still leaning on the cross, and a quick succession of convulsive sobs was her only reply. Guerin saw that all farther attempt to communicate with her in any way would be vain for the time ; and he only waited the arrival of the leech to leave the apartment.

Rigord, who acted both as physician and historian to Philip Augustus, instantly followed the Queen's attendant, who had been despatched

to seek him; and, after having received a promise from him to bring intelligence of the Queen's real state, the Minister retired to his own chamber, and hastened to render Philip's resolution irrevocable, by writing that letter of submission to the Holy See, which speedily raised the Interdict from France.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLACK and gloomy silence reigned through the whole château of Compiègne, during the two days that followed the Queen's determination to depart. All Philip's military operations were neglected—all the affairs of his immediate government were forgotten, and his hours passed in wandering alone in the forest, or in pacing his chamber with agitated and uncertain steps.

The thoughts and feelings that filled those hours, however, though all painful, were of a mixed and irregular character. Sometimes, it was the indignant swelling of a proud and imperious heart against the usurped power that snatched from it its brightest hopes. Sometimes, it was the thrilling agony of parting

from all he loved. Sometimes, it was the burning thirst for vengeance, both on the head of him who had caused the misery, and of those who, by their falling off in time of need, had left him to bear it alone ; and, sometimes, it was the shadowy doubts and suspicions of awakened jealousy, throwing all into darkness and gloom. Still, however, the deep, the passionate love remained ; and to it clung the faint hope of rewinning the treasure he sacrificed for a time.

Thus, as he strode along the paths of the forest, with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, he sketched out the stern but vast plan of crushing his rebellious barons peicemeal, as soon as ever the Interdict—that fatal bond of union amongst them—should be broken. He carried his glance too, still farther into the future ; and saw many a rising coalition against him in Europe, fomented and supported by the Church of Rome ; and, firm in his own vigorous talent, it was with a sort of joy that he con-

templated their coming, as the means whereby he would avenge the indignity he had suffered from the Roman See, crush his enemies, punish his disobedient vassals, and, extending his dominion to the infinite of hope, would hold Agnes once more to his heart, and dare the whole world to snatch her thence again.

Such were the thoughts of Philip Augustus, so mingled of many passions—ambition—love—revenge. Each in its turn using as its servant a great and powerful mind, and all bringing about—for with such opposite agents does Heaven still work its high will—all bringing about great changes to the world at large; revolutions in thoughts, in feelings, and in manners; the fall of systems, and the advance of the human mind.

Were we of those who love to view agony with a microscope, we would try equally to display the feelings of Agnes de Meranie; while, with crushed joys, blighted hopes, and a broken heart, she prepared for the journey

that was to separate her for ever from him she loved best on earth.

It would be too painful a picture, however, either to draw or to examine. Suffice it, then, that, recovered from the sort of stupor into which she had fallen after the efforts which had been called forth by Philip's presence, she sat in calm dejected silence; while her women, informed of her decision, made the necessary arrangements for her departure. If she spoke at all, it was but to direct care to be taken of each particular object, which might recall to her afterwards the few bright hours she had so deeply enjoyed. 'Twas now an ornament,—'twas now some piece of her dress, either given her by her husband, or worn on some day of peculiar happiness, which called her notice; and, as a traveller, forced to leave some bright land, that he may never see again, carries away with him a thousand views and charts, to aid remembrance in after-years, poor Agnes was anxious to secure alone, all that could lead memory back to the joys that she was quitting for ever.

To each little trinket, there was some memory affixed; and to her heart they were relics, as holy as ever lay upon shrine or altar.

It was on the second morning after her resolution had been taken; and, with a sad haste, springing from the consciousness of failing powers, she was hurrying on her preparations, when she was informed that the Chancellor, Guerin, desired a few minutes' audience. She would fain have shrunk from it; for, though she revered the Minister for his undoubted integrity, and his devotion to her husband, yet, it had so happened, that Guerin had almost always been called on to speak with her, for the purpose of communicating some painful news, or urging some bitter duty. The impression he had left on her mind, therefore, was aught but pleasant; and, though she esteemed him much, she loved not his society. She was of too gentle a nature, however, to permit a feeling, so painful to its object, to be seen for a moment, even now that the Minister's good word or bad, could serve her nothing;

and she desired him to be admitted immediately.

The havoc that a few hours had worked on a face which was once the perfection of earthly beauty struck even the Minister, unobservant as he was in general of things so foreign to his calling. As he remarked it, he made a sudden pause in his advance; and, looking up with a faint smile, more sad, more melancholy, than even tears, Agnes shook her head, saying mildly, as a comment on his surprise:—

“ It cannot be, Lord Bishop, that any one should suffer as I have suffered, and not let the traces shine out. But you are welcome, my Lord. How fares it with my noble Lord—my husband, the King. He has not come to me since yester-morning; and yet, methinks, we might have better borne these wretched two days together than apart. We might have fortified each other’s resolution with strong words. We might have shown each other, that what it was right to do, it was right to do firmly.”

“ The King, Madam,” replied Guerin, “ has scarcely been in a state to see any one. I have been thrice refused admittance, though my plea was urgent business of the state. He has been totally alone, till within the last few minutes.”

“ Poor Philip !” exclaimed Agnes, the tears, in spite of every effort, swelling in her eyes, and rolling over her fair pale cheek. “ Poor Philip! And did he think his Agnes would have tried to shake the resolution which cost him such pangs to maintain ? Oh, no ! She would have aided him to fix it, and to bear it.”

“ He feared not your constancy, Lady,” replied the Bishop of Senlis. “ He feared his own. I have heard that fortitude is a woman’s virtue ; and, in truth, I now believe it. But I must do my errand ; for, in faith, Lady, I cannot see you weep :”— and the good Minister wiped a bright drop from his own clear, cold eye. “ Having at last seen the King,” he proceeded, “ he has commanded me to take

strict care that all the attendants you please to name should accompany you ; that your household expenses should be charged upon his domains, as that of the Queen of France ; and having, from all things, good hope that the Pope, satisfied with this submission to his authority, will proceed immediately to verify the divorce pronounced by the bishops, so that your separation may be short — ”

“ Ha ! What ? ” exclaimed Agnes, starting up, and catching the Bishop’s arm with both her hands, while she gazed in his face with a look of thunderstruck, incredulous astonishment. What is it you say ? Is there a chance — is there a hope — is there a possibility that I may see him again — that I may clasp his hand — that I may rest on his bosom once more ? O God ! O God ! blessed be thy holy name ! ” and falling on her knees, she turned her beautiful eyes to Heaven ; while, clasping her fair hands, and raising them also, trembling with emotion, towards the sky, her lips moved

silently, but rapidly, in grateful enthusiastic thanksgiving.

“But, oh!” she cried, starting up, and fixing her eager glance upon the Minister, “as you are a churchman, as you are a knight, as you are a man! do not deceive me! Is there a hope? —is there even a remote hope? Does Philip think there is a hope?”

“It appears to me, Lady,” replied the Minister,—“and for no earthly consideration would I deceive you,—that there is every cause to hope. Our Holy Father the Pope would not take the matter of the King’s divorce even into consideration, till the Monarch submitted to the decision of the Church of Rome, which, he declared, was alone competent to decide upon the question,—a right which the bishops of France, he said, had arrogated unjustly to themselves.”

“And did he,” exclaimed Agnes solemnly,—“did he cast his curse upon this whole country — spread misery, desolation, and sorrow over the nation—stir up civil war and rebellion, and

tear two hearts assunder, that loved each other so devotedly, for the empty right to judge a cause that had been already judged, and do away a sentence which he knew not whether it was right or wrong?—and is this the representative of Christ's Apostle?"

" 'Tis even as you say, Lady, I am afraid," replied the Minister. " But even, suppose his conduct to proceed from pride and arrogance, which, Heaven forbid that I should insinuate!—our hope would be but strengthened by such an opinion. For, contented with having established his right and enforced his will, he will of course commission a council to inquire into the cause, and decide according to their good judgment. What that decision will be, is only known on high; but as many prelates of France will of course sit in that council, it is not likely that they will consent to reverse their own judgment."

" And what thinks the King?" demanded Agnes thoughtfully.

" No stronger proof, Lady, can be given,

that he thinks as I do," replied Guerin, " than his determination that you should never be far from him ; so that, as soon as the Papal decision shall be announced in his favour, he may fly to reunite himself to her he will ever look upon as his lawful wife. He begs, Madam, that you would name that royal château which you would desire for your residence —"

" Then I am not to quit France !" cried Agnes, hope and joy once more beaming up in her eyes. " I am not to put wide, foreign lands between us, and the journey of many a weary day ! Oh ! 'tis too much ! 'tis too much !" and sinking back into the chair where she had been sitting before the Minister's entrance, she covered her eyes with her hands, and let the struggle between joy and sorrow flow gently away in tears.

Guerin made a movement as if to withdraw ; but the Queen raised her hand, and stopped him. " Stay, my Lord Bishop, stay !" she said. " These are tears, such as I have not shed for long ; and there is in them a balmy

quality that will soothe many of the wounds in my heart. Before you go, I must render some reply to my dear Lord's message. Tell him—as my whole joy in life has been to be with him; so my only earthly hope is, to rejoin him soon. Thank him for all the blessed comfort he has sent me by your lips; and say to him, that it has snatched his Agnes from the brink of despair. Say, moreover, that I would fain, fain see him, if it will not pain him too deeply, before I take my departure from the halls where I have known so much happiness. But bid him not, on that account, to give his heart one pang to solace mine.—And now, my Lord, I will choose my residence.—Let me see. I will not say Compiègne; for, though I love it well, and have here many a dear memory, yet, I know, Philip loves it too; and I would that he should often inhabit some place that is full of remembrances of me. But there is a castle on the woody hill above Mantes where, once in the earliest days of our marriage, we spent a pleasant month. It shall be my widow's portion,

till I see my Lord again. Oh! why, why, why must we part at all? -- But, no!" she added more firmly, " it is doubtless right that it should be so: and, if we may thus buy for our fate the blessed certainty of never parting again, I will not think—I will try not to think —the price too dear."

" Perhaps, Madam, if I might venture to advise," said the Minister, " the interview you desire with the King would take place the last thing before your departure."

Agnes drooped her head.—" My departure!" said she mournfully. " True! 'twill be but one pain for all. I have ordered my departure for this evening, because I thought that the sooner I were gone, the sooner would the pain be over for Philip; but oh, Lord Bishop, you know not what it is, to take such a resolution of departure—to cut short, even by one brief minute, that fond lingering with which we cling to all the loved objects that have surrounded us in happiness. But it is right to do it, and it shall be done: my litter shall be

here an hour before supper ; what guards you and the King think necessary to escort me, I will beg you to command at the hour of three. But I hope," she added, in an almost imploring tone,—“ I hope I shall see my husband before I go ?”

“ Doubt it not, Madam,” said Guerin : “ I have but to express your desire. Could I but serve you farther ?”

“ In nothing, my good Lord,” replied the Queen ; “ but, in watching over the King like a father. Soothe his ruffled mood ; calm his hurt mind ; teach him, not to forget Agnes, but to bear her absence with more fortitude than she can bear his.—And now, my Lord,” she added, wiping the tears once more from her eyes, “ I will go and pray, against that dreadful hour. I have need of help, but Heaven will give it me ; and if ever woman’s heart broke in silence, it shall be mine this night.”

Guerin took his leave and withdrew ; and, proceeding to the cabinet of Philip Augustus,

gave him such an account of his conversation with the Queen, as he thought might soothe and console him, without shaking his resolution of parting from her, at least for a time. Philip listened, at first, in gloomy silence; but, as every now and then, through the dry account given by his plain Minister, shone out some touch of the deep affection borne him by his wife, a shade passed away from his brow, and he would exclaim, “ Ha ! said she so ?—Angel ! —Oh, Guerin, she is an angel ! ” Then starting up, struck by some sudden impulse, he paced the room with hasty and irregular steps.

“ A villain ! ” cried he at length,—“ a villain ! —Thibalt d’Auvergne, beware thy head ! —By the blessed rood ! Guerin, if I lay my hands upon him, I will cut his false heart from his mischief-devising breast ! Fiend ! fiend ! to strive to rob me of an angel’s love like that ! He has fled me, Guerin ! —he has fled me for the time. You have doubtless heard, within five minutes, he and his train had left the

town behind him. 'Twas the consciousness of villainy drove him to flight. But I will find him ! if I seek him in the heart of Africa ! The world shall not hold us two."

Guerin strove to calm the mind of the King, but it was in vain ; and, till the hour approached for the departure of Agnes from the castle, Philip spent the time either in breathing vows of vengeance against his adversaries, or in pacing up and down, and thinking, with a wrung and agonized heart, over the dreadful moment before him. At length he could bear it no longer ; and, throwing open the door of his cabinet, he walked hastily towards the Queen's apartments. Guerin followed, for a few paces, knowing that the critical moment was arrived when France was to be saved or lost — doubting the resolution of both Agnes and Philip, and himself uncertain how to act.

But before Philip had passed through the corridor, he turned to the Minister, and, holding up his hand, with an air of stern majesty

he said, “Alone, Guerin! I must be alone! At three, warn me!” and he pursued his way to the Queen’s apartment.

The next hour we must pass over in silence; for no one was witness to a scene that required almost more than mortal fortitude to support. At three, the Queen’s litter was in the castle-court, the sergeants of arms mounted to attend her, and the horses of her ladies held ready to set out. With a heart beating with stronger emotions than had ever agitated it in the face of adverse hosts, Guerin approached the apartments of Agnes de Meranie. He opened the door, but paused without pushing aside the tapestry, saying, “My Lord!”

“Come in,” replied Philip, in a voice of thunder; and Guerin, entering, beheld him standing in the midst of the floor with Agnes clinging to him, fair, frail, and faint, with her arms twined round his powerful frame, like the ivy clinging round some tall oak agitated by a storm. The King’s face was heated; his eyes

were red, and the veins of his temples were swelled almost to bursting. “ She shall not go!” cried he, as Guerin entered, in a voice both raised and shaken by the extremity of his feelings,—“ By the Lord of Heaven! she shall not go!”

There was energy in his tone, almost to madness; and Guerin stood silent, seeing all that he had laboured to bring about swept away in that moment. But Agnes slowly withdrew her arms from the King, raised her weeping face from his bosom, clasped her hands together, and gazed on him for a moment with a glance of deep and agonized feeling—then said in low but resolute voice, “ Philip, it must be done! Farewell, beloved! Farewell!” and, running forward towards the door, she took the arm of one of her women, to support her from the chamber.

Before she could go, however, Philip caught her again in his arms, and pressed kiss after kiss upon her lips and cheek. “ Help me!

help me!" said Agnes, and two of her women, gently disengaging her from the King's embrace, half bore, half carried her down the stairs, and, raising her into the litter, drew its curtains round, and veiled her farther sorrows from all other eyes.

When she was gone, Philip stood for a moment gazing, as it were, on vacancy,—twice, raised his hand to his head—made a step or two towards the door—reeled—staggered—and fell heavily on the floor, with the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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